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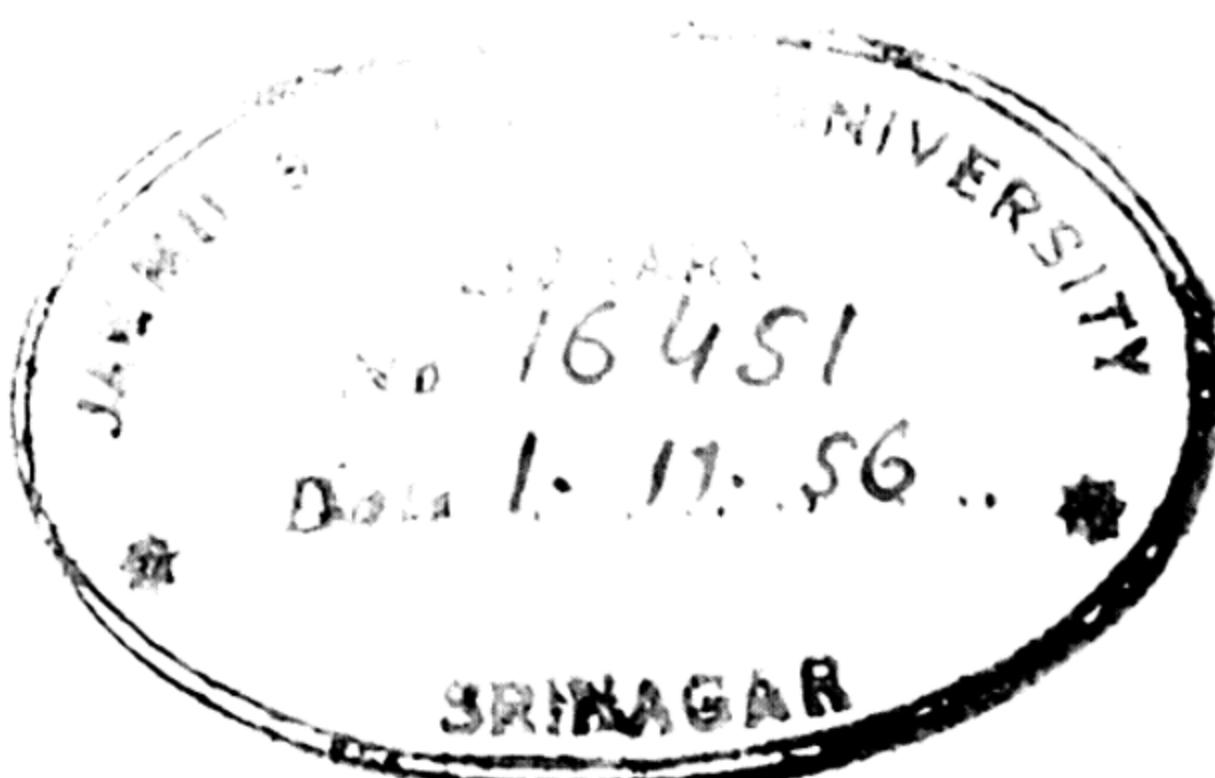
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GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM
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P. G. WODEHOUSE

P. G. Wodehouse has probably made more people laugh, on both sides of the Atlantic, than any other living writer. He began his career as an author by writing school stories. Now he has written over twenty novels and a dozen plays. He has perhaps a genius for the idiotic. His heroes are by ordinary standards genial half-wits, who move in a world of absurdly stern parents, musical-comedy aunts and enchantingly pretty heroines, who not unnaturally are always misunderstanding them. Almost his only intelligent character is the super-valet, Jeeves, the chief personage in *My Man Jeeves* and several other books.

It is hopeless to describe his books; one can only read them and laugh. Fifty years hence, though, they will still present a recognizable picture of to-day and still be laughed at.

These remarks will appear to bear little relation to the story that follows. The hero is a dog; but it has a thoroughly Wodehousian misunderstanding of the situations in which it finds itself, and it will certainly amuse.

THE MIXER—I

HE MEETS A SHY GENTLEMAN

LOOKING back, I always consider that my career as a dog proper really started when I was bought for the sum of half a crown by the Shy Man. That event marked the end of my puppyhood. The knowledge that I was worth actual cash to somebody filled me with a sense of new responsibilities. It sobered me. Besides, it was only after that half-crown changed hands that I went out into the great world; and, however interesting life may be in an East End public-house, it is only when you go out into the world that you really broaden your mind and begin to see things.

Within its limitations, my life had been singularly full and vivid. I was born, as I say, in a public-house in the East End, and however lacking a public-house may be in refinement and the true culture, it certainly provides plenty of excitement. Before I was six weeks old, I had upset three policemen by getting between their legs when they came round to the side-door, thinking they had heard suspicious noises; and I can still recall the interesting sensation of being chased seventeen times round the yard with a broom-handle after a well-planned and completely successful raid on the larder. These and other happenings of a like nature soothed for the moment but could not cure the restlessness which has always been so marked a trait in my character. I have always been restless, unable to settle down in one

place and anxious to get on to the next thing. This may be due to a gipsy strain in my ancestry—one of my uncles travelled with a circus—or it may be the Artistic Temperament, acquired from a grandfather who, before dying of a surfeit of paste in the property-room of the Bristol Coliseum, which he was visiting in the course of a professional tour, had an established reputation on the music-hall stage as one of Professor Pond's Performing Poodles.

I owe the fullness and variety of my life to this restlessness of mine, for I have repeatedly left comfortable homes in order to follow some perfect stranger who looked as if he were on his way to somewhere interesting. Sometimes I think I must have cat blood in me.

The Shy Man came into our yard one afternoon in April, while I was sleeping with mother in the sun on an old sweater which we had borrowed from Fred, one of the barmen. I heard mother growl, but I didn't take any notice. Mother is what they call a good watch-dog, and she growls at everybody except master. At first, when she used to do it, I would get up and bark my head off, but not now. Life's too short to bark at everybody who comes into our yard. It is behind the public-house, and they keep empty bottles and things there, so people are always coming and going.

Besides, I was tired. I had had a very busy morning, helping the men bring in a lot of cases of beer, and running into the saloon to talk to Fred and generally looking after things. So I was just dozing off again, when I heard a voice say, 'Well, he's ugly enough!' Then I knew that they were talking about me.

I have never disguised it from myself, and nobody has ever disguised it from me, that I am not a handsome dog. Even mother never thought me beautiful. She was no Gladys Cooper herself, but she never hesitated to criticize my appearance. In fact, I have yet to meet any one who did. The first thing strangers say about me is, ‘What an ugly dog!’

I don’t know what I am. I have a bulldog kind of a face, but the rest of me is terrier. I have a long tail which sticks straight up in the air. My hair is wiry. My eyes are brown. I am jet black, with a white chest. I once overheard Fred saying that I was a Gorgonzola cheese-hound, and I have generally found Fred reliable in his statements.

When I found that I was under discussion, I opened my eyes. Master was standing there, looking down at me, and by his side the man who had just said I was ugly enough. The man was a thin man, about the age of a barman and smaller than a policeman. He had patched brown shoes and black trousers.

‘But he’s got a sweet nature,’ said master.

This was true, luckily for me. Mother always said, ‘A dog without influence or private means, if he is to make his way in the world, must have either good looks or amiability.’ But, according to her, I overdid it. ‘A dog,’ she used to say, ‘can have a good heart, without chumming with every Tom, Dick, and Harry he meets. Your behaviour is sometimes quite un-doglike.’ Mother prided herself on being a one-man dog. She kept herself to herself, and wouldn’t kiss anybody except master—not even Fred.

Now, I'm a mixer. I can't help it. It's my nature. I like men. I like the taste of their boots, the smell of their legs, and the sound of their voices. It may be weak of me, but a man has only to speak to me and a sort of thrill goes right down my spine and sets my tail wagging.

I wagged it now. The man looked at me rather distantly. He didn't pat me. I suspected—what I afterwards found to be the case—that he was shy, so I jumped up at him to put him at his ease. Mother growled again. I felt that she did not approve.

'Why, he's took quite a fancy to you already,' said master.

The man didn't say a word. He seemed to be brooding on something. He was one of those silent men. He reminded me of Joe, the old dog down the street at the grocer's shop, who lies at the door all day, blinking and not speaking to anybody.

Master began to talk about me. It surprised me, the way he praised me. I hadn't a suspicion he admired me so much. From what he said you would have thought I had won prizes and ribbons at the Crystal Palace. But the man didn't seem to be impressed. He kept on saying nothing.

When master had finished telling him what a wonderful dog I was till I blushed, the man spoke.

'Less of it,' he said. 'Half a crown is my bid, and if he was an angel from on high you couldn't get another ha'penny out of me. What about it?'

A thrill went down my spine and out at my tail, for of course I saw now what was happening. The man wanted to buy me and take me away. I looked at master hopefully.

'He's more like a son to me than a dog,' said master, sort of wistful.

'It's his face that makes you feel that way,' said the man, unsympathetically 'If you had a son that's just how he would look. Half a crown is my offer, and I'm in a hurry.'

'All right,' said master, with a sigh, 'though it's giving him away, a valuable dog like that. Where's your half-crown?'

The man got a bit of rope and tied it round my neck.

I could hear mother barking advice and telling me to be a credit to the family, but I was too excited to listen.

'Good-bye, mother,' I said. 'Good-bye, master. Good-bye, Fred. Good-bye everybody. I'm off to see life. The Shy Man has bought me for half a crown. Wow!'

I kept running round in circles and shouting, till the man gave me a kick and told me to stop it.

So I did.

I don't know where we went, but it was a long way. I had never been off our street before in my life and I didn't know the whole world was half as big as that. We walked on and on, and the man jerking at my rope whenever I wanted to stop and look at anything. He wouldn't even let me pass the time of the day with dogs we met.

When we had gone about a hundred miles and were just going to turn in at a dark doorway, a policeman suddenly stopped the man. I could feel by the way the man pulled at my rope and tried to

hurry on that he didn't want to speak to the policeman. The more I saw of the man, the more I saw how shy he was.

'Hi!' said the policeman, and we had to stop.

'I've got a message for you, old pal,' said the policeman. 'It's from the Board of Health. They told me to tell you you needed a change of air. See?'

'All right!' said the man.

'And take it as soon as you like. Else you'll find you'll get it given you. See?'

I looked at the man with a good deal of respect. He was evidently some one very important, if they worried so about his health.

'I'm going down to the country to-night,' said the man.

The policeman seemed pleased.

'That's a bit of luck for the country,' he said. 'Don't go changing your mind.'

And we walked on, and went in at the dark doorway, and climbed about a million stairs and went into a room that smelt of rats. The man sat down and swore a little, and I sat and looked at him.

Presently I couldn't keep it in any longer.

'Do we live here?' I said. 'Is it true we're going to the country? Wasn't that policeman a good sort? Don't you like policemen? I knew lots of policemen at the public-house. Are there any other dogs here? What is there for dinner? What's in that cupboard? When are you going to take me out for another run? May I go out and see if I can find a cat?'

'Stop that yelping,' he said.

'When we go to the country, where shall we live?

Are you going to be a caretaker at a house? Fred's father is a caretaker at a big house in Kent. I've heard Fred talk about it. You didn't meet Fred when you came to the public-house, did you? You would like Fred. I like Fred. Mother likes Fred. We all like Fred.'

I was going on to tell him a lot more about Fred, who had always been one of my warmest friends, when he suddenly got hold of a stick and walloped me with it.

'You keep quiet when you're told,' he said.

He really was the shyest man I had ever met. It seemed to hurt him to be spoken to. However, he was the boss, and I had to humour him, so I didn't say any more.

We went down to the country that night, just as the man had told the policeman we would. I was all worked up, for I had heard so much about the country from Fred that I had always wanted to go there. Fred used to go off on a motor-bicycle sometimes to spend the night with his father in Kent, and once he brought back a squirrel with him, which I thought was for me to eat, but mother said no. 'The first thing a dog has to learn,' mother used often to say, 'is that the whole world wasn't created for him to eat.'

It was quite dark when we got to the country, but the man seemed to know where to go. He pulled at my rope, and we began to walk along a road with no people in it at all. We walked on and on, but it was all so new to me that I forgot how tired I was. I could feel my mind broadening with every step I took.

Every now and then we would pass a very big house, which looked as if it was empty, but I knew that there was a caretaker inside, because of Fred's father. These big houses belong to very rich people, but they don't want to live in them till the summer, so they put in caretakers, and the caretakers have a dog to keep off burglars. I wondered if that was what I had been brought here for.

'Are you going to be a caretaker?' I asked the man.

'Shut up,' he said.

So I shut up.

After we had been walking a long time, we came to a cottage. A man came out. My man seemed to know him, for he called him Bill. I was quite surprised to see the man was not at all shy with Bill. They seemed very friendly.

'Is that him?' said Bill, looking at me.

'Bought him this afternoon,' said the man.

'Well,' said Bill, 'he's ugly enough. He looks fierce. If you want a dog, he's the sort of dog you want. But what do you want one for? It seems to me it's a lot of trouble to take, when there's no need of any trouble at all. Why not do what I've always wanted to do? What's wrong with just fixing the dog, same as it's always done, and walking in and helping yourself?'

'I'll tell you what's wrong,' said the man. 'To start with, you can't get at the dog to fix him except by day, when they let him out. At night he's shut up inside the house. And suppose you do fix him during the day, what happens then? Either the bloke gets another before night, or else he sits up all night with a gun. It isn't like as if these blokes was

ordinary blokes. They're down here to look after the house. That's their job, and they don't take any chances.'

It was the longest speech I had ever heard the man make, and it seemed to impress Bill. He was quite humble.

'I didn't think of that,' he said. 'We'd best start in to train this tyke at once.'

Mother often used to say, when I went on about wanting to go out into the world and see life, 'You'll be sorry when you do. The world isn't all bones and liver.' And I hadn't been living with the man and Bill in their cottage long before I found out how right she was.

It was the man's shyness that made all the trouble. It seemed as if he hated to be taken notice of.

It started on my very first night at the cottage. I had fallen asleep in the kitchen, tired out after all the excitement of the day and the long walks I had had, when something woke me with a start. It was somebody scratching at the window, trying to get in.

Well, I ask you, I ask any dog, what would you have done in my place? Ever since I was old enough to listen, mother had told me over and over again what I must do in a case like this. It is the A B C of a dog's education. 'If you are in a room and you hear any one trying to get in,' mother used to say, 'bark. It may be some one who has business there, or it may not. Bark first, and inquire afterwards. Dogs were made to be heard and not seen.'

I lifted my head and yelled. I have a good, deep voice, due to a hound strain in my pedigree, and at the public-house, when there was a full moon, I have

often had people leaning out of the windows and saying things all down the street. I took a deep breath and let it go.

'Man!' I shouted. 'Bill! Man! Come quick! Here's a burglar getting in!'

Then somebody struck a light, and it was the man himself. He had come in through the window.

He picked up a stick, and he walloped me. I couldn't understand it. I couldn't see where I had done the wrong thing. But he was the boss, so there was nothing to be said.

If you'll believe me, that same thing happened every night. Every single night! And sometimes twice or three times before morning. And every time I would bark my loudest, and the man would strike a light and wallop me. The thing was baffling. I couldn't possibly have mistaken what mother had said to me. She said it too often for that. Bark! Bark! Bark! It was the main plank of her whole system of education. And yet, here I was, getting walloped every night for doing it.

I thought it out till my head ached, and finally I got it right. I began to see that mother's outlook was narrow. No doubt, living with a man like master at the public-house, a man without a trace of shyness in his composition, barking was all right. But circumstances alter cases. I belonged to a man who was a mass of nerves, who got the jumps if you spoke to him. What I had to do was to forget the training I had had from mother, sound as it no doubt was as a general thing, and to adapt myself to the needs of the particular man who had happened to buy me. I had tried mother's way, and all it had

brought me was walloping, so now I would think for myself.

So next night, when I heard the window go, I lay there without a word, though it went against all my better feelings. I didn't even growl. Some one came in and moved about in the dark, with a lantern, but, though I smelt that it was the man, I didn't ask him a single question. And presently the man lit a light and came over to me and gave me a pat, which was a thing he had never done before.

'Good dog!' he said. 'Now you can have this.'

And he let me lick out the saucepan in which the dinner had been cooked.

After that, we got on fine. Whenever I heard any one at the window I just kept curled up and took no notice, and every time I got a bone or something good. It was easy, once you had got the hang of things.

It was about a week after that the man took me out one morning, and we walked a long way till we turned in at some big gates and went along a very smooth road till we came to a great house, standing all by itself in the middle of a whole lot of country. There was a big lawn in front of it, and all round there were fields and trees, and at the back a great wood.

The man rang a bell, and the door opened, and an old man came out.

'Well?' he said, not very cordially.

'I thought you might want to buy a good watchdog,' said the man.

'Well, that's queer, your saying that,' said the caretaker. 'It's a coincidence. That's exactly what

I do want to buy. I was just thinking of going along and trying to get one. My old dog picked up something this morning that he oughtn't to have, and he's dead, poor feller.'

'Poor feller,' said the man. 'Found an old bone with phosphorus on it, I guess.'

'What do you want for this one?'

'Five shillings.'

'Is he a good watch-dog?'

'He's a grand watch-dog.'

'He looks fierce enough.'

'Ah!'

So the caretaker gave the man his five shillings, and the man went off and left me.

At first the newness of everything and the unaccustomed smells and getting to know the caretaker, who was a nice old man, prevented my missing the man, but as the day went on and I began to realize that he had gone and would never come back, I got very depressed. I pattered all over the house, whining. It was a most interesting house, bigger than I thought a house could possibly be, but it couldn't cheer me up. You may think it strange that I should pine for the man, after all the wallopings he had given me, and it is odd, when you come to think of it. But dogs are dogs, and they are built like that. By the time it was evening I was thoroughly miserable. I found a shoe and an old clothes-brush in one of the rooms, but could eat nothing. I just sat and moped.

It's a funny thing, but it seems as if it always happened that just when you are feeling most miserable, something nice happens. As I sat there, there

came from outside the sound of a motor-bicycle, and somebody shouted.

It was dear old Fred, my old pal Fred, the best old boy that ever stepped. I recognized his voice in a second, and I was scratching at the door before the old man had time to get up out of his chair.

Well, well, well! That was a pleasant surprise! I ran five times round the lawn without stopping, and then I came back and jumped up at him.

'What are you doing down here, Fred?' I said. 'Is this caretaker your father? Have you seen the rabbits in the wood? How long are you going to stop? How's mother? I like the country. Have you come all the way from the public-house? I'm living here now. Your father gave five shillings for me. That's twice as much as I was worth when I saw you last.'

'Why, it's young Nigger!' That was what they called me at the saloon. 'What are you doing here? Where did you get this dog, father?'

'A man sold him to me this morning. Poor old Bob got poisoned. This one ought to be just as good a watch-dog. He barks loud enough.'

'He should be. His mother is the best watch-dog in London. This cheese-hound used to belong to the boss. Funny him getting down here.'

We went into the house and had supper. And after supper we sat and talked. Fred was only down for the night, he said, because the boss wanted him back next day.

'And I'd sooner have my job, than yours, dad,' he said. 'Of all the lonely places! I wonder you aren't scared of burglars.'

'I've my shot-gun, and there's the dog. I might be scared if it wasn't for him, but he kind of gives me confidence. Old Bob was the same. Dogs are a comfort in the country.'

'Get many tramps here?'

'I've only seen one in two months, and that's the seller who sold me the dog here.'

As they were talking about the man, I asked Fred if he knew him. They might have met at the public-house, when the man was buying me from the boss.

'You would like him,' I said. 'I wish you could have met.'

They both looked at me.

'What's he growling at?' asked Fred. 'Think he heard something?'

The old man laughed.

'He wasn't growling. He was talking in his sleep. You're nervous, Fred. It comes of living in the city.'

'Well, I am. I like this place in the daytime, but it gives me the pip at night. It's so quiet. How you can stand it here all the time, I can't understand. Two nights of it would have me seeing things.'

His father laughed.

'If you feel like that, Fred, you had better take the gun to bed with you. I shall be quite happy without it.'

'I will,' said Fred. 'I'll take six if you've got them.'

And after that they went upstairs. I had a basket in the hall, which had belonged to Bob, the dog who had got poisoned. It was a comfortable basket, but I was so excited at having met Fred again that I couldn't sleep. Besides, there was a smell of mice

somewhere, and I had to move around, trying to place it.

I was just sniffing at a place in the wall, when I heard a scratching noise. At first I thought it was the mice working in a different place, but, when I listened, I found that the sound came from the window. Somebody was doing something to it from outside.

If it had been mother, she would have lifted the roof off right there, and so should I, if it hadn't been for what the man had taught me. I didn't think it possible that this could be the man come back, for he had gone away and said nothing about ever seeing me again. But I didn't bark. I stopped where I was and listened. And presently the window came open, and somebody began to climb in.

I gave a good sniff, and I knew it was the man.

I was so delighted that for a moment I nearly forgot myself and shouted with joy, but I remembered in time how shy he was, and stopped myself. But I ran to him and jumped up quite quietly, and he told me to lie down. I was disappointed that he didn't seem more pleased to see me. I lay down.

It was very dark, but he had brought a lantern with him, and I could see him moving about the room, picking things up and putting them in a bag which he had brought with him. Every now and then he would stop and listen, and then he would start moving round again. He was very quick about it, but very quiet. It was plain that he didn't want Fred or his father to come down and find him.

I kept thinking about this peculiarity of his while I watched him. I suppose, being chummy myself,

I find it hard to understand that everybody else in the world isn't chummy too. Of course, my experience at the public-house had taught me that men are just as different from each other as dogs. If I chewed master's shoe, for instance, he used to kick me; but if I chewed Fred's, Fred would tickle me under the ear. And, similarly, some men are shy and some men are mixers. I quite appreciated that, but I couldn't help feeling that the man carried shyness to a point where it became morbid. And he didn't give himself a chance to cure himself of it. That was the point. Imagine a man hating to meet people so much that he never visited their houses till the middle of the night, when they were in bed and asleep. It was silly. Shyness has always been something so outside my nature that I suppose I have never really been able to look at it sympathetically. I have always held the view that you can get over it if you make an effort. The trouble with the man was that he wouldn't make an effort. He went out of his way to avoid meeting people.

I was fond of the man. He was the sort of person you never got to know very well, but we had been together for quite a while, and I wouldn't have been a dog if I hadn't got attached to him.

As I sat and watched him creep about the room, it suddenly came to me that here was a chance of doing him a real good turn in spite of himself. Fred was upstairs, and Fred, as I knew by experience, was the easiest man to get along with in the world. Nobody could be shy with Fred. I felt that if only I could bring him and the man together, they would get along splendidly, and it would teach the man

not to be silly and avoid people. It would help to give him the confidence which he needed. I had seen him with Bill, and I knew that he could be perfectly natural and easy when he liked.

It was true that the man might object at first, but after a while he would see that I had acted simply for his good, and would be grateful.

The difficulty was, how to get Fred down without scaring the man. I knew that if I shouted he wouldn't wait, but would be out of the window and away before Fred could get there. What I had to do was to go to Fred's room, explain the whole situation quietly to him, and ask him to come down and make himself pleasant.

The man was far too busy to pay any attention to me. He was kneeling in a corner with his back to me, putting something in his bag. I seized the opportunity to steal softly from the room.

Fred's door was shut, and I could hear him snoring. I scratched gently, and then harder, till I heard the snores stop. He got out of bed and opened the door.

'Don't make a noise,' I whispered. 'Come on downstairs. I want you to meet a friend of mine.'

At first he was quite peevish.

'What's the idea,' he said, 'coming and spoiling a man's beauty-sleep? Get out.'

He actually started to go back into the room.

'No, honestly, Fred,' I said, 'I'm not fooling you. There is a man downstairs. He got in through the window. I want you to meet him. He's very shy, and I think it will do him good to have a chat with you.'

'What are you whining about?' Fred began, and then he broke off suddenly and listened. We could both hear the man's footsteps as he moved about.

Fred jumped back into the room. He came out carrying something. He didn't say any more, but started to go downstairs, very quiet, and I went after him.

There was the man, still putting things in his bag. I was just going to introduce Fred, when Fred, the silly ass, gave a great yell.

I could have bitten him.

'What did you want to do that for, you chump?' I said. 'I told you he was shy. Now you've scared him.'

He certainly had. The man was out of the window quicker than you would have believed possible. He just flew out. I called after him that it was only Fred and me, but at that moment a gun went off with a tremendous bang, so he couldn't have heard me.

I was pretty sick about it. The whole thing had gone wrong. Fred seemed to have lost his head entirely. He was behaving like a perfect ass. Naturally the man had been frightened with him carrying on in that way. I jumped out of the window to see if I could find the man and explain, but he was gone. Fred jumped out after me, and nearly squashed me.

It was pitch dark out there. I couldn't see a thing. But I knew the man could not have gone far, or I should have heard him. I started to sniff round on the chance of picking up his trail. It wasn't long before I struck it.

Fred's father had come down now, and they were running about. The old man had a light. I followed the trail, and it ended at a large cedar-tree, not far from the house. I stood underneath it and looked up, but of course I could not see anything.

'Are you up there?' I shouted. 'There's nothing to be scared at. It was only Fred. He's an old pal of mine. He works at the place where you bought me. His gun went off by accident.. He won't hurt you.'

There wasn't a sound. I began to think I must have made a mistake.

'He's got away,' I heard Fred say to his father and, just as he said it I caught a faint sound of some one moving in the branches above me.

'No he hasn't!' I shouted. 'He's up this tree.'

'I believe the dog's found him, dad!'

'Yes, he's up here. Come along and meet him.'

Fred came to the foot of the tree.

'You up there,' he said, 'come along down.'

Not a sound from the tree.

'It's all right,' I explained, 'he *is* up there, but he's very shy. Ask him again.'

'All right,' said Fred. 'Stay there if you want to. But I'm going to shoot off this gun into the branches just for fun.'

And then the man started to come down. As soon as he touched the ground I jumped up at him.

'This is fine!' I said. 'Here's my friend Fred. You'll like him.'

But it wasn't any good. They didn't get along together at all. They hardly spoke. The man went into the house, and Fred went after him, carrying

his gun. And when they got into the house it was just the same. The man sat in one chair, and Fred sat in another, and after a long time some men came in a motor-car, and the man went away with them. He didn't say good-bye to me.

When he had gone, Fred and his father made a great fuss of me. I couldn't understand it. Men are so odd. The man wasn't a bit pleased that I had brought him and Fred together, but Fred seemed as if he couldn't do enough for me for having introduced him to the man. However, Fred's father produced some cold ham—my favourite dish—and gave me quite a lot of it, so I stopped worrying over the thing. As mother used to say, 'Don't bother your head about what doesn't concern you. The only thing a dog need concern himself with is the bill-of-fare. Eat your bun, and don't make yourself busy about other people's affairs.' Mother's was in some ways a narrow outlook, but she had a great fund of sterling common sense.

Acorn 6451

THE MIXER—II

HE MOVES IN SOCIETY

IT was one of those things which are really nobody's fault. It was not the chauffeur's fault, and it was not mine. I was having a friendly turn-up with a pal of mine on the side-walk; he ran across the road; I ran after him; and the car came round the corner and hit me. It must have been going pretty slow, or I should have been killed. As it was, I just had the breath knocked out of me. You know how you feel when the butcher catches you just as you are edging out of the shop with a bit of meat. It was like that.

I wasn't taking much interest in things for a while, but when I did I found that I was the centre of a group of three—the chauffeur, a small boy, and the small boy's nurse.

The small boy was very well dressed, and looked delicate. He was crying.

'Poor doggie,' he said, 'poor doggie.'

'It wasn't my fault, Master Peter,' said the chauffeur respectfully. 'He run out into the road before I seen him.'

'That's right,' I put in, for I didn't want to get the man into trouble.

'Oh, he's not dead,' said the small boy. 'He barked.'

'He growled,' said the nurse. 'Come away, Master Peter. He might bite you.'

Women are trying sometimes. It is almost as if they deliberately misunderstood.

'I won't come away. I'm going to take him home with me and send for the doctor to come and see him. He's going to be my dog.'

This sounded all right. Goodness knows I am no snob, and can rough it when required, but I do like comfort when it comes my way, and it seemed to me that this was where I got it. And I liked the boy. He was the right sort.

The nurse, a very unpleasant woman, had to make objections.

'Master Peter! You can't take him home, a great, rough, fierce, common dog! What would your mother say?'

'I'm going to take him home,' repeated the child, with a determination which I heartily admired, 'and he's going to be my dog. I shall call him Fido.'

There's always a catch in these good things. Fido is a name I particularly detest. All dogs do. There was a dog called that that I knew once, and he used to get awfully sick when we shouted it out after him in the street. No doubt there have been respectable dogs called Fido, but to my mind it is a name like Aubrey or Clarence. You may be able to live it down, but you start handicapped. However, one must take the rough with the smooth, and I was prepared to yield the point.

'If you wait, Master Peter, your father will buy you a beautiful, lovely dog. . . .'

'I don't want a beautiful, lovely dog. I want this dog.'

The slur did not wound me. I have no illusions about my looks. Mine is an honest, but not a beautiful, face.

'It's no use talking,' said the chauffeur, grinning. 'He means to have him. Shove him in, and let's be getting back, or they'll be thinking His Nibs has been kidnapped.'

So I was carried to the car. I could have walked, but I had an idea that I had better not. I had made my hit as a crippled dog, and a crippled dog I intended to remain till things got more settled down.

The chauffeur started the car off again. What with the shock I had had and the luxury of riding in a motor-car, I was a little distract, and I could not say how far we went. But it must have been miles and miles, for it seemed a long time afterwards that we stopped at the biggest house I have ever seen. There were smooth lawns and flower-beds, and men in overalls, and fountains and trees and, away to the right, kennels with about a million dogs in them, all pushing their noses through the bars and shouting. They all wanted to know who I was and what prizes I had won, and then I realized that I was moving in high society.

I let the small boy pick me up and carry me into the house, though it was all he could do, poor kid, for I was some weight. He staggered up the steps and along a great hall, and then let me flop on the carpet of the most beautiful room you ever saw. The carpet was a yard thick.

There was a woman sitting in a chair, and as soon as she saw me she gave a shriek.

'I told Master Peter you would not be pleased, m'lady,' said the nurse, who seemed to have taken a positive dislike to me, 'but he would bring the nasty brute home.'

'He's not a nasty brute, mother. He's my dog, and his name's Fido. John ran over him in the car, and I brought him home to live with us. I love him.'

This seemed to make an impression. Peter's mother looked as if she were weakening.

'But, Peter dear, I don't know what your father will say. He's so particular about dogs. All his dogs are prize-winners, pedigree dogs. This is such a mongrel.'

'A nasty, rough, ugly, common dog, m'lady,' said the nurse, sticking her oar in in an absolutely uncalled-for way.

Just then a man came into the room.

'What on earth?' he said, catching sight of me.

'It's a dog Peter has brought home. He says he wants to keep him.'

'I'm *going* to keep him,' corrected Peter firmly.

I do like a child that knows his own mind. I was getting fonder of Peter every minute. I reached up and licked his hand.

'See! He knows he's my dog, don't you, Fido? He licked me.'

'But, Peter, he looks so fierce.' This, unfortunately, is true. I do look fierce. It is rather a misfortune for a perfectly peaceful dog. 'I'm sure it's not safe your having him.'

'He's my dog, and his name's Fido. I am going to tell cook to give him a bone.'

His mother looked at his father, who gave rather a nasty laugh.

'My dear Helen,' he said, 'ever since Peter was born, ten years ago, he has not asked for a single thing, to the best of my recollection, which he has

not got. Let us be consistent. I don't approve of this caricature of a dog, but if Peter wants him, I suppose he must have him.'

'Very well. But the first sign of viciousness he shows, he shall be shot. He makes me nervous.'

So they left it at that, and I went off with Peter to get my bone.

After lunch, he took me to the kennels to introduce me to the other dogs. I had to go, but I knew it would not be pleasant, and it wasn't. Any dog will tell you what these prize-ribbon dogs are like. Their heads are so swelled they have to go into their kennels backwards.

It was just as I had expected. There were mastiffs, terriers, poodles, spaniels, bulldogs, sheepdogs, and every other kind of dog you can imagine, all prize-winners at a hundred shows, and every single dog in the place just shoved his head back and laughed himself sick. I never felt so small in my life, and I was glad when it was over and Peter took me off to the stables.

I was just feeling that I never wanted to see another dog in my life, when a terrier ran out, shouting. As soon as he saw me, he came up inquisitively, walking very stiff-legged, as terriers do when they see a stranger.

'Well,' I said, 'and what particular sort of a prize-winner are you? Tell me all about the ribbons they gave you at the Crystal Palace, and let's get it over.'

He laughed in a way that did me good.

'Guess again!' he said. 'Did you take me for one of the nuts in the kennels? My name's Jack, and I belong to one of the grooms.'

'What!' I cried. 'You aren't Champion Bowlegs Royal or anything of that sort! I'm glad to meet you.'

So we rubbed noses as friendly as you please. It was a treat meeting one of one's own sort. I had had enough of those high-toned dogs who look at you as if you were something the garbage-man had forgotten to take away.

'So you've been talking to the swells, have you?' said Jack.

'He would take me,' I said, pointing to Peter.

'Oh, you're his latest, are you? Then you're all right—while it lasts.'

'How do you mean, while it lasts?'

'Well, I'll tell you what happened to me. Young Peter took a great fancy to me once. Couldn't do enough for me for a while. Then he got tired of me, and out I went. You see, the trouble is that while he's a perfectly good kid, he has always had everything he wanted since he was born, and he gets tired of things pretty easy. It was a toy railway that finished me. Directly he got that, I might not have been on the earth. It was lucky for me that Dick, my present old man, happened to want a dog to keep down the rats, or goodness knows what might not have happened to me. They aren't keen on dogs here unless they've pulled down enough blue ribbons to sink a ship, and mongrels like you and me—no offence—don't last long. I expect you noticed that the grown-ups didn't exactly cheer when you arrived?'

'They weren't chummy.'

'Well, take it from me, your only chance is to

make them chummy. If you do something to please them, they might let you stay on, even though Peter was tired of you.'

'What sort of thing?'

'That's for you to think out. I couldn't find one. I might tell you to save Peter from drowning. You don't need a pedigree to do that. But you can't drag the kid to the lake and push him in. That's the trouble. A dog gets so few opportunities. But, take it from me, if you don't do something within two weeks to make yourself solid with the adults, you can make your will. In two weeks Peter will have forgotten all about you. It's not his fault. It's the way he has been brought up. His father has all the money on earth, and Peter's the only child. You can't blame him. All I say is, look out for yourself. Well, I'm glad to have met you. Drop in again when you can. I can give you some good ratting, and I have a bone or two put away. So long.'

It worried me badly what Jack had said. I couldn't get it out of my mind. If it hadn't been for that, I should have had a great time, for Peter certainly made a lot of fuss of me. He treated me as if I were the only friend he had.

And, in a way, I was. When you are the only son of a man who has all the money in the world, it seems that you aren't allowed to be like an ordinary kid. They coop you up, as if you were something precious that would be contaminated by contact with other children. In all the time that I was at the house I never met another child. Peter

had everything in the world, except some one of his own age to go round with; and that made him different from any of the kids I had known.

He liked talking to me. I was the only person round who really understood him. He would talk by the hour and I would listen with my tongue hanging out and nod now and then.

It was worth listening to, what he used to tell me. He told me the most surprising things. I didn't know, for instance, that there were any Red Indians in England but he said there was a chief named Big Cloud who lived in the rhododendron bushes by the lake. I never found him, though I went carefully through them one day. He also said that there were pirates on the island in the lake. I never saw them either.

What he liked telling me about best was the city of gold and precious stones which you came to if you walked far enough through the woods at the back of the stables. He was always meaning to go off there some day, and, from the way he described it, I didn't blame him. It was certainly a pretty good city. It was just right for dogs, too, he said, having bones and liver and sweet cakes there and everything else a dog could want. It used to make my mouth water to listen to him.

We were never apart. I was with him all day, and I slept on the mat in his room at night. But all the time I couldn't get out of my mind what Jack had said. I nearly did once, for it seemed to me that I was so necessary to Peter that nothing could separate us; but just as I was feeling safe his father gave him a toy aeroplane, which flew

when you wound it up. The day he got it, I might not have been on the earth. I trailed along, but he hadn't a word to say to me.

Well, something went wrong with the aeroplane the second day, and it wouldn't fly, and then I was in solid again; but I had done some hard thinking and I knew just where I stood. I was the newest toy, that's what I was, and something newer might come along at any moment, and then it would be the finish for me. The only thing for me was to do something to impress the adults, just as Jack had said.

Goodness knows I tried. But everything I did turned out wrong. There seemed to be a fate about it. One morning, for example, I was trotting round the house early, and I met a fellow I could have sworn was a burglar. He wasn't one of the family, and he wasn't one of the servants, and he was hanging round the house in a most suspicious way. I chased him up a tree, and it wasn't till the family came down to breakfast, two hours later, that I found that he was a guest who had arrived overnight, and had come out early to enjoy the freshness of the morning and the sun shining on the lake, he being that sort of man. That didn't help me much.

Next, I got in wrong with the boss, Peter's father. I don't know why. I met him out in the park with another man, both carrying bundles of sticks and looking very serious and earnest. Just as I reached him, the boss lifted one of the sticks and hit a small white ball with it. He had never seemed to want to play with me before, and I took it as a great compliment. I raced after the ball, which he had hit

quite a long way, picked it up in my mouth, and brought it back to him. I laid it at his feet, and smiled up at him.

'Hit it again,' I said.

He wasn't pleased at all. He said all sorts of things and tried to kick me, and that night, when he thought I was not listening, I heard him telling his wife that I was a pest and would have to be got rid of. That made me think.

And then I put the lid on it. With the best intentions in the world I got myself into such a mess that I thought the end had come.

It happened one afternoon in the drawing-room. There were visitors that day—women; and women seemed fatal to me. I was in the background, trying not to be seen, for, though I had been brought in by Peter, the family never liked my coming into the drawing-room. I was hoping for a piece of cake and not paying much attention to the conversation, which was all about somebody called Toto, whom I had not met. Peter's mother said Toto was a sweet little darling, he was; and one of the visitors said Toto had not been at all himself that day and she was quite worried. And a good lot more about how all that Toto would ever take for dinner was a little white meat of chicken, chopped up fine. It was not very interesting, and I had allowed my attention to wander.

And just then, peeping round the corner of my chair to see if there were any signs of cake, what should I see but a great beastly brute of a rat. It was standing right beside the visitor, drinking milk out of a saucer, if you please!

I may have my faults, but procrastination in the presence of rats is not one of them. I didn't hesitate for a second. Here was my chance. If there is one thing women hate, it is a rat. Mother always used to say, 'If you want to succeed in life, please the women. They are the real bosses. The men don't count.' By eliminating this rodent I should earn the gratitude and esteem of Peter's mother, and, if I did that, it did not matter what Peter's father thought of me.

I sprang.

The rat hadn't a chance to get away. I was right on to him. I got hold of his neck, gave him a couple of shakes, and chucked him across the room. Then I ran across to finish him off.

Just as I reached him, he sat up and barked at me. I was never so taken aback in my life. I pulled up short and stared at him.

'I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir,' I said apologetically. 'I thought you were a rat.'

And then everything broke loose. Somebody got me by the collar, somebody else hit me on the head with a parasol, and somebody else kicked me in the ribs. Everybody talked and shouted at the same time.

'Poor darling Toto!' cried the visitor, snatching up the little animal. 'Did the great savage brute try to murder you!'

'So absolutely unprovoked!'

'He just flew at the poor little thing!'

It was no good my trying to explain. Any dog in my place would have made the same mistake. The creature was a toy dog of one of those extraordinary

breeds—a prize-winner and champion, and so on, of course, and worth his weight in gold. I would have done better to bite the visitor than Toto. That much I gathered from the general run of the conversation, and then, having discovered that the door was shut, I edged under the sofa. I was embarrassed.

'That settles it!' said Peter's mother. 'The dog is not safe. He must be shot.'

Peter gave a yell at this, but for once he didn't swing the voting an inch.

'Be quiet, Peter,' said his mother. 'It is not safe for you to have such a dog. He may be mad.'

Women are very unreasonable.

Toto, of course, wouldn't say a word to explain how the mistake arose. He was sitting on the visitor's lap, shrieking about what he would have done to me if they hadn't separated us.

Somebody felt cautiously under the sofa. I recognized the shoes of Weeks, the butler. I suppose they had rung for him to come and take me, and I could see that he wasn't half liking it. I was sorry for Weeks, who was a friend of mine, so I licked his hand, and that seemed to cheer him up a whole lot.

'I have him now, madam,' I heard him say.

'Take him to the stables and tie him up, Weeks, and tell one of the men to bring his gun and shoot him. He is not safe.'

A few minutes later I was in an empty stall, tied up to the manger.

It was all over. It had been pleasant while it lasted, but I had reached the end of my tether now. I don't think I was frightened, but a sense of pathos

stole over me. I had meant so well. It seemed as if good intentions went for nothing in this world. I had tried so hard to please everybody, and this was the result—tied up in a dark stable, waiting for the end.

The shadows lengthened in the stable-yard, and still nobody came. I began to wonder if they had forgotten me, and presently, in spite of myself, a faint hope began to spring up inside me that this might mean that I was not to be shot after all. Perhaps Toto at the eleventh hour had explained everything.

And then footsteps sounded outside, and the hope died away. I shut my eyes.

Somebody put his arms round my neck, and my nose touched a warm cheek. I opened my eyes. It was not the man with the gun come to shoot me. It was Peter. He was breathing very hard, and he had been crying.

‘Quiet!’ he whispered.

He began to untie the rope.

‘You must keep quite quiet, or they will hear us, and then we shall be stopped. I’m going to take you into the woods, and we’ll walk and walk until we come to the city I told you about that’s all gold and diamonds, and we’ll live there for the rest of our lives, and no one will be able to hurt us. But you must keep very quiet.’

He went to the stable-gate and looked out. Then he gave a little whistle to me to come after him. And we started out to find the city.

The woods were a long way away, down a hill of long grass and across a stream; and we went very carefully, keeping in the shadows and running across

the open spaces. And every now and then we would stop and look back, but there was nobody to be seen. The sun was setting, and everything was very cool and quiet.

Presently we came to the stream and crossed it by a little wooden bridge, and then we were in the woods, where nobody could see us.

I had never been in the woods before, and everything was very new and exciting to me. There were squirrels and rabbits and birds, more than I had ever seen in my life, and little things that buzzed and flew and tickled my ears. I wanted to rush about and look at everything, but Peter called to me, and I came to heel. He knew where we were going, and I didn't, so I let him lead.

We went very slowly. The wood got thicker and thicker the farther we got into it. There were bushes that were difficult to push through, and long branches, covered with thorns, that reached out at you and tore at you when you tried to get away. And soon it was quite dark, so dark that I could see nothing, not even Peter, though he was so close. We went slower and slower, and the darkness was full of queer noises. From time to time Peter would stop, and I would run to him and put my nose in his hand. At first he patted me, but after a while he did not pat me any more, but just gave me his hand to lick, as if it was too much for him to lift it. I think he was getting very tired. He was quite a small boy and not strong, and we had walked a long way.

It seemed to be getting darker and darker. I could hear the sound of Peter's footsteps, and they seemed

to drag as he forced his way through the bushes. And then, quite suddenly, he sat down without any warning, and when I ran up I heard him crying.

I suppose there are lots of dogs who would have known exactly the right thing to do, but I could not think of anything except to put my nose against his cheek and whine. He put his arm round my neck, and for a long time we stayed like that, saying nothing. It seemed to comfort him, for after a time he stopped crying.

I did not bother him by asking about the wonderful city where we were going, for he was so tired. But I could not help wondering if we were near it. There was not a sign of any city, nothing but darkness and odd noises and the wind singing in the trees. Curious little animals, such as I had never smelt before, came creeping out of the bushes to look at us. I would have chased them, but Peter's arm was round my neck and I could not leave him. But when something that smelt like a rabbit came so near that I could have reached out a paw and touched it, I turned my head and snapped; and then they all scurried back into the bushes and there were no more noises.

There was a long silence. Then Peter gave a great gulp.

‘I’m not frightened,’ he said. ‘I’m not!’

I shoved my head closer against his chest. There was another silence for a long time.

‘I’m going to pretend we have been captured by brigands,’ said Peter at last. ‘Are you listening? There were three of them, great big men with beards, and they crept up behind me and snatched me up

and took me out here to their lair. This is their lair. One was called Dick, the other's names were Ted and Alfred. They took hold of me and brought me all the way through the wood till we got here, and then they went off, meaning to come back soon. And while they were away, you missed me and tracked me through the woods till you found me here. And then the brigands came back, and they didn't know you were here, and you kept quite quiet till Dick was quite near, and then you jumped out and bit him and he ran away. And then you bit Ted and you bit Alfred, and they ran away too. And so we were left all alone, and I was quite safe because you were here to look after me. And then—— And then——'

His voice died away, and the arm that was round my neck went limp, and I could hear by his breathing that he was asleep. His head was resting on my back, but I didn't move. I wriggled a little closer to make him as comfortable as I could, and then I went to sleep myself.

I didn't sleep very well. I had funny dreams all the time, thinking these little animals were creeping up close enough out of the bushes for me to get a snap at them without disturbing Peter.

If I woke once, I woke a dozen times, but there was never anything there. The wind sang in the trees and the bushes rustled, and far away in the distance the frogs were calling.

And then I woke once more with the feeling that this time something really was coming through the bushes. I lifted my head as far as I could, and listened. For a little while nothing happened, and

then, straight in front of me, I saw lights. And there was a sound of trampling in the undergrowth.

It was no time to think about not waking Peter. This was something definite, something that had to be attended to quick. I was up with a jump, yelling. Peter rolled off my back and woke up, and he sat there listening, while I stood with my front paws on him and shouted at the men. I was bristling all over. I didn't know who they were or what they wanted, but the way I looked at it was that anything could happen in those woods at that time of night, and, if anybody was coming along to start something, he had got to reckon with me.

Somebody called, 'Peter! Are you there, Peter?'

There was a crashing in the bushes, the lights came nearer and nearer, and then somebody said, 'Here he is!' and there was a lot of shouting. I stood where I was, ready to spring if necessary, for I was taking no chances.

'Who are you?' I shouted. 'What do you want?' A light flashed in my eyes.

'Why, it's that dog!'

Somebody came into the light, and I saw it was the boss. He was looking very anxious and scared, and he scooped Peter up off the ground and hugged him tight.

Peter was only half awake. He looked up at the boss drowsily, and began to talk about brigands, and Dick and Ted and Alfred, the same as he had said to me. There wasn't a sound till he had finished. Then the boss spoke.

'Kidnappers! I thought as much. And the dog drove them away!'

For the first time in our acquaintance he actually patted me.

'Good old man!' he said.

'He's my dog,' said Peter sleepily, 'and he isn't to be shot.'

'He certainly isn't, my boy,' said the boss. 'From now on he's the honoured guest. He shall wear a gold collar and order what he wants for dinner. And now let's be getting home. It's time you were in bed.'

Mother used to say, 'If you're a good dog, you will be happy. If you're not, you won't,' but it seems to me that in this world it is all a matter of luck. When I did everything I could to please people, they wanted to shoot me; and when I did nothing except run away, they brought me back and treated me better than the most valuable prize-winner in the kennels. It was puzzling at first, but one day I heard the boss talking to a friend who had come down from the city.

The friend looked at me and said, 'What an ugly mongrel! Why on earth do you have him about? I thought you were so particular about your dogs?'

And the boss replied, 'He may be a mongrel, but he can have anything he wants in this house. Didn't you hear how he saved Peter from being kidnapped?'

And out it all came about the brigands.

'The kid called them brigands,' said the boss. 'I suppose that's how it would strike a child of that age. But he kept mentioning the name Dick, and that put the police on the scent. It seems there's a kidnapper well-known to the police all over the

country as Dick the Snatcher. It was almost certainly that scoundrel and his gang. How they spirited the child away, goodness knows, but they managed it, and the dog tracked them and scared them off. We found him and Peter together in the woods. It was a narrow escape, and we have to thank this animal here for it.'

What could I say? It was no more use trying to put them right than it had been when I mistook Toto for a rat. Peter had gone to sleep that night pretending about the brigands to pass the time, and when he awoke he still believed in them. He was that sort of child. There was nothing that I could do about it.

Round the corner, as the boss was speaking, I saw the kennel-man coming with a plate in his hand. It smelt fine, and he was headed straight for me.

He put the plate down before me. It was liver, which I love.

'Yes,' went on the boss, 'if it hadn't been for him, Peter would have been kidnapped and scared half to death, and I should be poorer, I suppose, by whatever the scoundrels had chosen to hold me up for.'

I am an honest dog, and hate to obtain credit under false pretences, but—liver is liver. I let it go at that.

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

This is the nom-de-plume of Canon Hannay, now Vicar of a London parish. He was born in Ireland and lived there many years. Most of his books are about Ireland and Irish people, though some, doubtless because he was for a time chaplain to the British legation in Budapest, are about the Balkans. Spanish Gold is perhaps the best known. They range from the exciting and the mysterious to the comic. All bear the mark of his particular brand of humour, ironic, kindly, and detached. Everything is slightly ridiculous, people in authority chiefly so. The most desperate and exciting situations are rounded off with an amusing bump into the commonplace. So in the following story, which begins by looking suspiciously like a thriller and ends up almost a farce. Fantastic in itself it is recognizably near to everyday life.

ON BEHALF OF THE STATE

DICK MAHONY—Colonel Mahony of the Connaught Lancers—looked round him with satisfaction. He had every reason to be pleased with his surroundings. The smooth white cloth on the breakfast-table, the shining silver, the vases of fresh flowers, the background of dark walls and old portraits, the carpet under his feet—all these appealed to his sense of what was beautiful and fitting. In front of him was a plate of bacon and eggs—Irish bacon and fresh eggs. At his elbow was a dish of hot scones and a rack of toast. On the side table behind him were covered dishes and a cold ham. After two years abroad the abundance of a home breakfast was delightful.

The windows of the room were wide open, and beyond them lay the lawn, green as only an Irish lawn ever is. The soft warm air of a southern Irish summer filled the room, laden with the scent of limes and many flowers. After the baked streets of Budapest and the brown plains of Hungary, this was paradise.

Susie Graydon, Dick Mahony's sister, sat at the end of the table. Her husband had not yet come in to breakfast.

'After all, Susie,' said Dick, 'you may grumble and grouse as you like, but there's nothing in the whole world equal to this.'

Susie sighed. As a member of the Inter-Allied Mission of Control, Dick had spent two years in

various capitals of Europe, seeing to it that Germans, Austrians, Hungarians and the rest of the old foes did not get ready for another war. Susie had spent these same two years in Ireland. She was not sure that it was the pleasantest place in the world to live.

'If you'd been living in stuffy hotels,' said Dick, 'and getting nothing for breakfast except a tablespoonful of coffee and a jug of whipped cream, you'd know better than to grumble about Ireland, even if politics are a bit thick sometimes.'

It was the memory of the Hungarian breakfast which lingered unpleasantly in his mind. He had always resented the whipped cream.

Then Dermod Graydon walked into the room. He carried a scrap of dirty paper between his finger and thumb, holding it stiffly in front of him at arm's length, as if it had an offensive smell or was laden with the germs of an infectious disease. He was just in time to hear the end of his brother-in-law's eulogy of Ireland.

'When you've been here a week,' he said, 'you'll be jolly glad to go back to Jugo-Slovakia.'

Budapest is not in Jugo-, Czechko-, or any other Slovakia, but Dick had more sense than to try to teach his brother-in-law geography.

'Look at that!' said Dermod.

He laid the dirty paper on the table in front of Dick.

'Would even an Albanian brigand do a thing like that?' he said.

Dick picked up the paper and read it.

'Rialtas Sealadac na heireann. Your motor car has

been requisitioned for the service of the State.—
‘JOHN COYNE, Chief of Staff, I.R.A.’

‘Recuis’, evidently an attempt at ‘requisitioned’, had been scratched out. Coyne, though Chief of the Staff, was evidently doubtful about the spelling. Even ‘commandered’ had not turned out right, lacking one of the e’s which it usually has.

‘Johnny Coyne,’ said Dermod with fierce contempt, ‘is a fellow that six months ago was cleaning my boots and knives. I found that precious document nailed up on the door of the garage, and the car was gone. They’ve probably got it in the barracks at Ballymure, and I paid eight hundred pounds for it three months ago.’

‘I’d never have thought it of Johnny Coyne,’ said Susie. ‘He was always such a civil boy.’

Dermod was at the side table cutting ham. He had six or seven slices on his plate when he sat down to the table. The loss of his car had not spoiled his appetite. Even if his house had been burned down and he had been driven out on to the road he would have dined heartily in the first decent hotel he came to in his flight. He would also have cursed. He cursed while he ate his ham, muttering imprecations with his mouth full. If his wishes had been effective, society in hell would have been of a mixed kind that morning. The whole English Cabinet would have been there, all Irish leaders, alive and dead, the editors of nearly every daily paper, and, of course, Johnny Coyne.

‘Johnny seems to have got a bit bogged over his spelling,’ said Susie, who had the paper in her hand.

'You'd expect a Staff Officer to make a better attempt at "commandeered".'

'A damned ignorant savage,' said Dermod. 'I'm surprised that he can even write his name.'

'Lots of Staff Officers are shaky about spelling,' said Dick. 'I'm never quite sure myself how many g's there are in "agreement".'

Dermod then cursed the Irish system of education, more because of what it did teach than for its failure to teach spelling.

'And after all,' Dick went on soothingly, 'our friend, Coyne, knows two languages, which is more than you do, Dermod. I suppose that's Irish at the top of the paper?'

'Johnny Coyne knows no more Irish than I do,' said Dermod. 'He copied that stuff straight off a postage stamp. I don't suppose he has the faintest idea what it means.'

After breakfast Dermod's temper improved slightly. He became almost normal when he had smoked his first pipe, but he was still liable to sudden outbursts of blasphemy. Dick, walking round the stables with him, suggested that it might be possible to get the car back.

'What about the police?' he said.

'You'd better have stayed in Budapest if that's all you know about Ireland,' said Dermod. 'There are no police now—haven't been for the last eighteen months. Those that weren't shot have cleared out of the country.'

Then Dermod gave his brother-in-law a short, vividly-worded account of the present state of Ireland. Dick, picking his way carefully among the

adjectives, gathered that the more ardent Irish had taken to fighting each other now that there were no longer any police or English soldiers in the country.

'Free Staters and Republicans? Is that what you call them?' said Dick.

'That's what they call themselves,' said Dermod. 'I call them blackguards and super-blackguards.'

'And which side is Johnny Coyne on?'

'I don't know,' said Dermod, 'and I don't care. Probably on both. One to-day and the other to-morrow. That's the way with most of them.'

'If we knew which side he was on,' said Dick, 'we might get the other fellows to go for him and take away the car. I suppose they'd do it for a ten-pound-note?'

'They'd keep it themselves if they did,' said Dermod, 'and I'd be no better off. So that plan's a washout.'

Dick was rebuffed and went away. At lunch-time, having spent several hours in quiet thought, he attacked the subject again.

'Suppose now, Dermod, you had your car back—'

'There's no earthly use supposing that. I can't get it.'

'But suppose you did, what would you do with it? Wouldn't it just be taken from you again?'

'If I had it back,' said Dermod, 'I wouldn't be fool enough to keep it here. I'd drive it straight up to Dublin and ship it to Holyhead. That's what I'd have done months ago if I hadn't been a damned fool.'

'Dick, dear,' said Susie after lunch, 'I wish you wouldn't talk any more about that car. It only makes poor Dermod worse. He's always dreadfully irritable when these things happen.'

Dick had taken possession of Johnny Coyne's ill-spelt note. He took it from his pocket and spread it out in front of Susie.

'I suppose that stuff at the top of the paper really is Irish,' he said.

'I expect so,' said Susie. 'It's what's printed on all the postage stamps anyway.'

'Tell me,' said Dick, 'did any of your servants know that Coyne fellow really well?'

'They all knew him, of course,' said Susie. 'He used to be in and out of the house constantly doing odd jobs.'

'I'd like to have a talk with one of them,' said Dick. 'Which would you say is the most intelligent and trustworthy? What about Jeffares?'

Jeffares was the butler, entirely trustworthy, but, according to Susie's report, lacking in general intelligence. She recommended Jessie McNiece, her own maid.

'Jessie's a bright girl,' she said, 'who takes an interest in things, and has had a flirtation with every man about the place under forty. I think you can depend on her. Her father's an Orangeman from Ballymena, or some place like that, up in the north.'

'I'd like to have a chat with Jessie,' said Dick. 'I suppose she won't want to flirt with me?'

'She will if you give her the least encouragement,' said Susie.

‘Well,’ said Dick, ‘I must risk that.’

• • • •

At half-past five that afternoon Dermod and Susie were sitting under the lime-tree on the lawn with the tea-table between them. Dick Mahony was not there. They were speculating mildly about what had happened to him when they heard the hoot of a motor at the avenue gate.

A few minutes later the car swept towards the house. It was Dermod’s car. Dick was driving it. He jumped out of it when he saw the Graydons on the lawn. Dermod and Susie leaped from their chairs and ran to meet him.

‘You’ve got the car!’ shouted Dermod.

‘There she is for you,’ said Dick; ‘safe and sound: but I don’t think you’ll be able to keep her here for long.’

‘I’ll drive up to Dublin to-night,’ said Dermod. ‘How the devil did you get her back?’

‘And Dick,’ said Susie, ‘where on earth did you get that hat?’

It was a sufficiently remarkable hat. A greyish-green, soft felt hat with the brim looped up at one side. Dick took it off and looked at it admiringly.

‘It belongs to the butcher boy,’ he said. ‘Jessie borrowed it for me when he came this afternoon with the meat. The way the brim is looped up shows that I’m a Brigadier-General in one of the Irish armies. Jessie knew all about that and fixed it up for me. She’s an invaluable girl, that maid of yours. Just look here.’

With a sweep of his hand he pulled a wisp of his

hair sideways over his forehead. It had been carefully oiled and stayed where he put it, the end of it just touching his right eyebrow.

'That,' he said, 'is what's called the "Sinn Fein quiff." Only the out-and-out whole-hoggers wear their hair that way, so Jessie says, and she appears to know. She's a tip-top hairdresser, Susie.'

'She's the best maid I ever had at doing my hair,' said Susie.

'I wish you'd tell me how you got the car,' said Dermod.

'I am telling you,' said Dick. 'My hat and *coiffure*—that's the right word, isn't it, Susie?—are part of the story. Just look at my coat.'

He was wearing a Norfolk jacket, greyish-green like the hat, a good deal frayed about the cuffs and badly stained in front.

'That belongs to one of your gardeners,' said Dick. 'Jessie offered to take the stains out of it for him. He's rather a friend of hers.'

'They all are,' said Susie.

'She lent it to me for the afternoon,' said Dick. 'It's a most patriotic kind of coat. I'm not at all sure it isn't uniform. Anyhow the man who owns it is going off with a flying column next week. That's why he wants the stains removed.'

'Go on about the car,' said Dermod. 'I don't see how dressing up helped you.'

'Arrayed as you see me now,' said Dick, 'and with my "quiff" pulled well out under my hat so that every one could see it, I walked into Ballymure. I expected to find our friend Coyne in the barracks, and I was perfectly right. The car was standing in

front of what used to be the officers' mess, and Coyne inside. There was a kind of sentry fellow lounging about with a cigarette in his mouth. I don't know the Irish for "Attention," so I said "Harrum uhp!" an international phrase used by drill-sergeants everywhere, whatever language they or their men speak. That made the sentry jump, and he showed me in to where Johnny Coyne was without asking any questions. By the way, Johnny is quite a decent fellow, much more inclined to be friendly than most Staff Officers.'

'I always said he had good manners,' said Susie.

'He gave me a drink,' said Dick, 'and offered to take me out for a joy ride in the car. He said he was waiting for two young ladies to join him and that I might sit in the back with one of them if I liked—a telegraph clerk, and quite good-looking. I saw her afterwards.'

'Who the devil did he think you were?' said Dermod.

'I don't know who he thought I was,' said Dick. 'What I told him was that I was an *etteremi*, which impressed him tremendously. Jessie told me that he didn't know six words of Irish, so I felt perfectly safe.'

'But is that Irish?' said Susie, doubtfully.

'Certainly not,' said Dick. 'It's Hungarian for a dining-room. It was written up over the door of the restaurant in the hotel I stayed at in Budapest, and as I read it two or three times every day while I was there, I remember it pretty well. Then I told him I had come for the car, and gave him a letter authorizing and commanding him to hand it over

to me. I thought you'd like to see that letter so I kept a copy. Here it is.'

He handed over a sheet of notepaper to Dermod. At the top of it were the words which Johnny Coyne put on his original notice of the theft of the motor-car. They were recognizably and plainly Irish. Next came, '*A chara.*'

'Jessie told me,' said Dick, 'that letters in Irish always begin that way, so I put the words in just to reassure Coyne. The rest of it——'

'The rest of it looks to me like gibberish,' said Dermod.

'It does,' said Dick. 'But as a matter of fact it's perfectly good Hungarian, though it's a little disjointed, and doesn't mean exactly what I told Johnny Coyne it did. The first three words, *Kir dohány jövedék* are the name of a cigarette that I used to smoke. The next bit is a sort of prayer, I think. It's stuck up in all the tram-cars in Budapest, and ends in "Amen". But I left that out for fear of exciting suspicion. After that I put in the words for "Opera box," "Turkish bath," the name of a rather nice white wine, and a few more things that every fellow gets to know. I was afraid the letter was a bit short, but I knew no more Hungarian and I didn't like to repeat myself. However, it was all right. Johnny Coyne read it through three times with the deepest respect, trying to look as if he understood every word of it. Then he handed me over the motor-car. I felt quite sorry for him and the two girls, who turned up just as I was driving off.'

'Well, I'm damned,' said Dermod.

'If I were you,' said Dick, 'I'd ship that car off

to England at once. Johnny Coyne kept my letter, and I expect he'll send it up to Dublin when he writes his report of the affair. I don't suppose any one there will be able to read it, but they may know that it isn't Irish.'

'I'm inclined to think,' said Dermod, 'that I'd better ship you off as well as the car. This won't be a healthy place for you when Johnny Coyne finds out what you've done.'

'Well,' said Dick, 'I'll be sorry to leave you and Susie, but perhaps—— I say, what about that girl, Jessie? Won't they suspect her?"

'Jessie must stay where she is,' said Susie. 'I can't spare a girl who's so good at hairdressing. I'm thinking of taking to a "Sinn Fein quiff" myself. It's rather becoming to you, Dick.'

ARNOLD BENNETT

Arnold Bennett was born in 1867, and after beginning to earn his living as a lawyer's clerk, became a journalist and short-story writer. He remained a journalist to the end of his life, and as such earned fabulous sums. But he will be remembered as a novelist. Of some of his novels the best that can be said is that they were successful; others, such as The Old Wives' Tale, Clayhanger, Riceyman Steps, are indisputably great literature. He died in 1931.

It is difficult to write about his work without describing his character. About everything he wrote, except when, as in The Old Wives' Tale, he was in the highest degree an artist, there is a richly personal tang. Some people's stories and books, though coming from their imagination, seem to take shape coldly and outside them. But Bennett's are like blazing fragments thrown out from a fire, or like newly minted coins, all hot from the press. Perhaps this is rather exalted language to use of some one who was merely very human and violently interested in other people. Besides, the people he wrote about are very ordinary people, who lived in the usual neighbourhood of most of his stories—The Five Towns, a disguise for that part of the Potteries from which he himself came. Bennett was very conscious of being a provincial, and very proud of conquering London. He delighted in the comfort and elegance of civilization, but he adored, too, and was intrigued by the uncouth richness of provincial life. The people he describes are ordinary, and their adventures are no more than ordinarily funny or tragic, but his way of telling them and his passionate curiosity about his characters' motives make everything fresh and exciting. The story given here is about a dentist. There is something impossibly unpromising about a dentist, nor does this one do anything more remarkable than pull out the tooth of a mayor's wife. It shows Bennett in his best ironic manner, laughing at Hanbridge's discomforts, but liking them, and at the Mayoress, but admiring her, in fact presenting in a fantastic manner a genuine chunk of life.

THREE EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF MR. COWLISHAW, DENTIST

I

THEY all happened on the same day. And that day was a Saturday, the red Saturday on which, in the unforgettable football match between Tottenham Hotspur and the Hanbridge F.C. (formed regardless of expense in the matter of professionals to take the place of the bankrupt Knype F.C.), the referee would certainly have been murdered had not a Five Towns crowd observed its usual miraculous self-restraint.

Mr. Cowlishaw—aged twenty-four, a fair-haired bachelor with a weak moustache—had bought the practice of the retired Mr. Rapper, a dentist of the very old school. He was not a native of the Five Towns. He came from St. Albans, and had done the deal through an advertisement in the *Dentists' Guardian*, a weekly journal full of exciting interest to dentists. Save such knowledge as he had gained during two preliminary visits to the centre of the world's earthenware manufacture, he knew nothing of the Five Towns; practically, he had everything to learn. And one may say that the Five Towns is not a subject that can be 'got up' in a day.

His place of business—or whatever high-class dentists choose to call it—in Crown Square was quite ready for him when he arrived on the Friday night: specimen 'uppers' and 'lowers' and odd teeth shining in their glass case, the new black-and-gold

door-plate on the door, and the electric filing apparatus, which he had purchased, in the operating-room. Nothing lacked there. But his private lodgings were not ready; at least, they were not what he, with his finicking Albanian notions, called ready, and, after a brief altercation with his landlady, he went off with a bag to spend the night at the Turk's Head Hotel. The Turk's Head is the best hotel in Hanbridge, not excepting the new Hotel Metropole (Limited, and German-Swiss waiters). The proof of its excellence is that the proprietor, Mr. Simeon Clowes, was then the Mayor of Hanbridge, and Mrs. Clowes one of the acknowledged leaders of Hanbridge society.

Mr. Cowlshaw went to bed. He was a good sleeper; at least, he was what is deemed a good sleeper in St. Albans. He retired about eleven o'clock, and requested one of the barmaids to instruct the boots to arouse him at 7 a.m. She faithfully promised to do so.

He had not been in bed five minutes before he heard and felt an earthquake. This earthquake seemed to have been born towards the north-east, in the direction of Crown Square, and the shock seemed to pass southwards in the direction of Knype. The bed shook; the basin and ewer rattled together like imperfect false teeth in the mouth of an arrant coward; the walls of the hotel shook. Then silence! No cries of alarm, no cries for help, no lamentations of ruin! Doubtless, though earthquakes are rare in England, the whole town had been overthrown and engulfed, and only Mr. Cowlshaw's bed left standing. Conquering his

terror, Mr. Cowlishaw put his head under the clothes and waited.

He had not been in bed ten minutes before he heard and felt another earthquake. This earthquake seemed to have been born towards the north-east, in the direction of Crown Square, and to be travelling southwards; and Mr. Cowlishaw noticed that it was accompanied by a strange sound of heavy bumping. He sprang courageously out of bed and rushed to the window. And it so happened that he caught the earthquake in the very act of flight. It was one of the new cars of the Five Towns Electric Traction Company, Limited, guaranteed to carry fifty-two passengers. The bumping was due to the fact that the driver, by a too violent application of the brake, had changed the form of two of its wheels from circular to oval. Such accidents do happen, even to the newest cars, and the inhabitants of the Five Towns laugh when they hear a bumpy car as they laugh at *Charley's Aunt*. The car shot past, flashing sparks from its overhead wire and flaming red and green lights of warning, and vanished down the main thoroughfare. And gradually the ewer and basin ceased their colloquy. The night being the night of the 29th December, and exceedingly cold, Mr. Cowlishaw went back to bed.

'Well,' he muttered, 'this is a bit thick, this is?' (They use such language in cathedral towns.) 'However, let's hope it's the last.'

It was not the last. Exactly, it was the last but twenty-three. Regularly at intervals of five minutes the Five Towns Electric Traction Company, Limited,

sent one of their dreadful engines down the street, apparently with the object of disintegrating all the real property in the neighbourhood into its original bricks. At the seventeenth time Mr. Cowlishaw trembled to hear a renewal of the bump-bump-bump. It was the oval-wheeled car, which had been to Longshaw and back. He recognized it as an old friend. He wondered whether he must expect it to pass a third time. However, it did not pass a third time. After several clocks in and out of the hotel had more or less agreed on the fact that it was one o'clock, there was a surcease of earthquakes. Mr. Cowlishaw dared not hope that earthquakes were over. He waited in strained attention during quite half an hour, expectant of the next earthquake. But it did not come. Earthquakes were, indeed, done with till the morrow.

It was about two o'clock when his nerves were sufficiently tranquilized to enable him to envisage the possibility of going to sleep. And he was just slipping, gliding, floating off when he was brought back to realities by a terrific explosion of laughter at the head of the stairs outside his bedroom door. The building rang like the inside of a piano when you strike a wire directly. The explosion was followed by low rumblings of laughter and then by a series of jolly, hearty 'Good nights.' He recognized the voices as being those of a group of commercial travellers and two actors (of the Hanbridge Theatre Royal's specially selected London Pantomime Company), who had been pointed out to him with awe and joy by the aforesaid barmaid. They were telling each other stories in the private bar, and

apparently they had been telling each other stories ever since. And the truth is that the atmosphere of the Turk's Head, where commercial travellers and actors forgather every night except perhaps Sundays, contains more good stories to the cubic inch than any other resort in the county of Staffordshire. A few seconds after the explosion there was a dropping fusillade—the commercial travellers and the actors shutting their doors. And about five minutes later there was another and more complicated dropping fusillade—the commercial travellers and actors opening their doors, depositing their boots (two to each soul), and shutting their doors.

Then silence.

And then out of the silence the terrified Mr. Cowlishaw heard arising and arising a vast and fearful breathing, as of some immense prehistoric monster in pain. At first he thought he was asleep and dreaming. But he was not. This gigantic sighing continued regularly, and Mr. Cowlishaw had never heard anything like it before. It banished sleep.

After about two hours of its awful uncanniness, Mr. Cowlishaw caught the sound of creeping footsteps in the corridor and fumbling noises. He got up again. He was determined, though he should have to interrogate burglars and assassins, to discover the meaning of that horrible sighing. He courageously pulled his door open, and saw an aproned man with a candle marking boots with chalk, and putting them into a box.

'I say!' said Mr. Cowlishaw.

'Beg yer pardon, sir,' the man whispered. 'I'm

getting forward with my work so as I can go to th' fut-baw match this afternoon. I hope I didn't wake ye, sir.'

'Look here!' said Mr. Cowlishaw. "What's that appalling noise that's going on all the time?"

'Noise, sir?' whispered the man, astonished.

'Yes,' Mr. Cowlishaw insisted. "Like something breathing. Can't you hear it?"

The man cocked his ears attentively. The noise veritably boomed in Mr. Cowlishaw's ears.

'Oh! *That!*' said the man at length. 'That's th' blast furnaces at Couldon Bar Ironworks. Never heard that afore, sir? Why, it's like that every night. Now you mention it, I *do* hear it! It's a good couple o' miles off, though, that is!'

Mr. Cowlishaw closed his door.

At five o'clock, when he had nearly, but not quite, forgotten the sighing, his lifelong friend, the oval-wheeled electric car, bumped and quaked through the street, and the ewer and basin chattered together busily, and the seismic phenomena definitely recommenced. The night was still black, but the industrial day had dawned in the Five Towns. Long series of carts without springs began to jolt past under the window of Mr. Cowlishaw, and then there was a regular multitudinous clacking of clogs and boots on the pavement. A little later the air was rent by first one steam-whistle, and then another, and then another, in divers tones announcing that it was six o'clock, or five minutes past, or half-past, or anything. The periodicity of earthquakes had by this time quickened to five minutes, as at midnight. A motor-car emerged under the archway of the

hotel, and remained stationary outside with its engine racing. And amid the earthquakes, the motor-car, the carts, the clogs and boots, and the steam muezzins calling the faithful to work, Mr. Cowlishaw could still distinguish the tireless, monstrous sighing of the Couldon Bar blast-furnaces. And, finally, he heard another sound. It came from the room next to his, and, when he heard it, exhausted though he was, exasperated though he was, he burst into laughter so comically did it strike him.

It was an alarm clock going off in the next room.

And, further, when he arrived downstairs, the barmaid, sweet, conscientious little thing, came up to him and said, 'I'm so sorry, sir. I quite forgot to tell the boots to call you!'

II

That afternoon he sat in his beautiful new surgery and waited for dental sufferers to come to him from all quarters of the Five Towns. It needs not to be said that nobody came. The mere fact that a new dentist has 'set up' in a district is enough to cure all the toothache for miles around. The one martyr who might, perhaps, have paid him a visit and a fee did not show herself. This martyr was Mrs. Simeon Clowes, the mayoress. By a curious chance, he had observed, during his short sojourn at the Turk's Head, that the landlady thereof was obviously in pain from her teeth, or from a particular tooth. She must certainly have informed herself as to his name and condition, and Mr. Cowlishaw thought that it would have been a graceful act on her part to

patronize him, as he had patronized the Turk's Head. But, no! Mayoresses, even the most tactful, do not always do the right thing at the right moment.

Besides, she had doubtless gone, despite toothache, to the football match with the Mayor, the new club being under the immediate patronage of his Worship. All the potting world had gone to the football match. Mr. Cowlshaw would have liked to go, but it would have been madness to quit the surgery on his opening day. So he sat and yawned, and peeped at the crowd crowding to the match at two o'clock, and crowding back in the gloom at four o'clock; and at a quarter past five he was reading a full description of the carnage and the heroism in the football edition of the *Signal*. Though Hanbridge had been defeated, it appeared from the *Signal* that Hanbridge was the better team, and that Rannoch, the new Scotch centre-forward, had fought nobly for the town which had bought him so dear.

Mr. Cowlshaw was just dozing over the *Signal* when there happened a ring at his door. He did not precipitate himself upon the door. With beating heart he retained his presence of mind, and said to himself that of course it could not possibly be a client. Even dentists who bought a practice ready-made never had a client on their first day. He heard the attendant answer the ring, and then he heard the attendant saying, 'I'll see, sir.'

It was, in fact, a patient. The servant, having asked Mr. Cowlshaw if Mr. Cowlshaw was at liberty, introduced the patient to the Presence, and the Presence trembled.

The patient was a tall, stiff, fair man of about thirty, with a tousled head and inelegant but durable clothing. He had a drooping moustache, which prevented Mr. Cowlishaw from adding his teeth up instantly.

'Good afternoon, mister,' said the patient, abruptly.

'Good afternoon,' said Mr. Cowlishaw. 'Have you . . . Can I . . .'

Strange; in the dental hospital and school there had been no course of study in the art of patterning to patients!

'It's like this,' said the patient, putting his hand in his waistcoat pocket.

'Will you kindly sit down,' said Mr. Cowlishaw, turning up the gas, and pointing to the chair of chairs.

'It's like this,' repeated the patient, doggedly. 'You see these three teeth?'

He displayed three very real teeth in a piece of reddened paper. As a spectacle, they were decidedly not appetizing, but Mr. Cowlishaw was hardened.

'Really!' said Mr. Cowlishaw, impartially, gazing on them.

'They're my teeth,' said the patient. And there-upon he opened his mouth wide, and displayed, not without vanity, a widowed gum. "'Ont 'eeth,' he exclaimed, keeping his mouth open and omitting preliminary consonants.

'Yes,' said Mr. Cowlishaw, with a dry inflexion. 'I saw that they were upper incisors. How did this come about? An accident, I suppose?'

'Well,' said the man, 'you may call it an accident;

I don't. My name's Rannoch; centre-forward. Ye see? Were ye at the match?"

Mr. Cowlshaw understood. He had no need of further explanation; he had read it all in the *Signal*. And so the chief victim of Tottenham Hotspur had come to him, just him! This was luck! For Rannoch was, of course, the most celebrated man in the Five Towns, and the idol of the populace. He might have been M.P. had he chosen.

'Dear me!' Mr. Cowlshaw sympathized, and he said again, pointing more firmly to the chair of chairs, 'Will you sit down?'

'I had em' all picked up,' Mr. Rannoch proceeded, ignoring the suggestion. 'Because a bit of a scheme came into my head. And that's why I've come to you, as you're just commencing dentist. Supposing you put these teeth on a bit of green velvet in the case in your window, with a big card to say as they're guaranteed to be my genuine teeth, knocked out by that blighter of a Tottenham half-back, you'll have such a crowd as was never seen around your door. All the Five Towns'll come to see 'em. It'll be the biggest advertisement that either you or any other dentist ever had. And you might put a little notice in the *Signal* saying that my teeth are on view at your premises; it would only cost ye a shilling. . . . I should expect ye to furnish me with new teeth for nothing, ye see.'

In his travels throughout England Mr. Rannoch had lost most of his Scotch accent, but he had not lost his Scotch skill in the art and craft of trying to pay less than other folks for whatever he might happen to want.

Assuredly the idea was an idea of genius. As an advertisement it would be indeed colossal and unique. Tens of thousands would gaze spellbound for hours at those relics of their idol, and every gazer would inevitably be familiarized with the name and address of Mr. Cowlishaw, and with the fact that Mr. Cowlishaw was dentist-in-chief to the heroical Rannoch. Unfortunately, in dentistry there is etiquette. And the etiquette of dentistry is as terrible, as unbending, as the etiquette of the Court of Austria.

Mr. Cowlishaw knew that he could not do this thing without sinning against etiquette.

'I'm sorry I can't fall in with your scheme,' said he, 'but I can't.'

'But, *man!*' protested the Scotchman, 'it's the greatest scheme that ever was.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Cowlishaw, 'but it would be unprofessional.'

Mr. Rannoch was himself a professional. 'Oh, well,' he said sarcastically, 'if you're one of those amateurs—'

'I'll put you the job in as low as possible,' said Mr. Cowlishaw, persuasively.

But Scotchmen are not to be persuaded like that.

Mr. Rannoch wrapped up his teeth and left.

What finally happened to those teeth Mr. Cowlishaw never knew. But he satisfied himself that they were not advertised in the *Signal*.

III

Now, just as Mr. Cowlishaw was personally conducting to the door the greatest goal-getter that the Five Towns had ever seen there happened another ring, and thus it fell out that Mr. Cowlishaw found himself in the double difficulty of speeding his first visitor and welcoming his second all in the same breath. It is true that the second might imagine that the first was a client, but then the aspect of Mr. Rannoch's mouth, had it caught the eye of the second was not reassuring. However, Mr. Rannoch's mouth happily did not catch the eye of the second.

The second was a visitor beyond Mr. Cowlishaw's hopes, no other than Mrs. Simeon Clowes, landlady of the Turk's Head and Mayoress of Hanbridge; a tall and well-built, handsome, downright woman, of something more than fifty and something less than sixty; the mother of five married daughters, the aunt of fourteen nephews and nieces, the granddam of seven, or it might be eight, assorted babies; in short, a lady of vast influence. After all, then, she had come to him! If only he could please her, he regarded his succession to his predecessor as definitely established and his fortune made. No person in Hanbridge with any yearnings for style would dream, he trusted, of going to any other dentist than the dentist patronized by Mrs. Clowes.

She eyed him interrogatively and firmly. She probed into his character, and he felt himself pierced.

'You *are* Mr. Cowlishaw?' she began.

'Good afternoon, Mrs. Clowes,' he replied. 'Yes, I am. Can I be of service to you?'

'That depends,' she said.

He asked her to step in, and in she stepped.

'Have you had any experience in taking teeth out?' she asked in the surgery. Her hand stroked her left cheek.

'Oh, yes,' he said eagerly. 'But, of course, we try to avoid extraction as much as possible.'

'If you're going to talk like that,' she said coldly, and even bitterly, 'I'd better go.'

He wondered what she was driving at.

'Naturally,' he said, summoning all his latent powers of diplomacy, 'there are cases in which extraction is unfortunately necessary.'

'How many teeth have you extracted?' she inquired.

'I really couldn't say,' he lied. 'Very many.'

'Because,' she said, 'you don't look as if you could say "Bo!" to a goose.'

He observed a gleam in her eye.

'I think I can say "Bo!" to a goose,' he said.

She laughed.

'Don't fancy, Mr. Cowlishaw, that if I laugh I'm not in the most horrible pain. I am. When I tell you I couldn't go with Mr. Clowes to the match—'

'Will you take this seat?' he said, indicating the chair of chairs; 'then I can examine.'

She obeyed. 'I do hate the horrid, velvety feeling of these chairs,' she said; 'it's most creepy.'

'I shall have to trouble you to take your bonnet off.'

So she removed her bonnet, and he took it as he might have taken his firstborn, and laid it gently to rest on his cabinet. Then he pushed the gas-bracket

so that the light came through the large crystal sphere, and made the Mayoress blink.

'Now,' he said soothingly, 'kindly open your mouth—wide.'

Like all women of strong and generous character, Mrs. Simeon Clowes had a large mouth. She obediently extended it to dimensions which must be described as august, at the same time pointing with her gloved and chubby finger to a particular part of it.

'Yes, yes,' murmured Mr. Cowlishaw, assuming a tranquillity which he did not feel. This was the first time that he had ever looked into the mouth of a Mayoress, and the prospect troubled him.

He put his little ivory-handled mirror into that mouth and studied its secrets.

'I see,' he said, withdrawing the mirror. 'Exposed nerve. Quite simple. Merely wants stopping. When I've done with it the tooth will be as sound as ever it was. All your other teeth are excellent.'

Mrs. Clowes arose violently out of the chair.

'Now just listen to me, please,' she said. 'I don't want any stopping; I won't have any stopping; I want that tooth out. I've already quarrelled with one dentist this afternoon because he refused to take it out. I came to you because you're young, and I thought you'd be more reasonable. Surely a body can decide whether she'll have a tooth out or not! It's my tooth. What's a dentist for? In my young days dentists never did anything else but take teeth out. All I wish to know is, will you take it out or will you not?'

'It's really a pity——'

'That's my affair, isn't it?' she stopped him, and moved towards her bonnet.

'If you insist,' he said quickly, 'I will extract.'

'Well,' she said, 'if you don't call this insisting, what do you call insisting? Let me tell you I didn't have a wink of sleep last night!'

'Neither did I, in your confounded hotel!' he nearly retorted; but thought better of it.

The Mayoress resumed her seat, taking her gloves off.

'It's decided then?' she questioned.

'Certainly,' said he. 'Is your heart good?'

'Is my heart good?' she repeated. 'Young man, what business is that of yours? It's my tooth I want you to deal with, not my heart.'

'I must give you gas,' said Mr. Cowlishaw, faintly.

'Gas!' she exclaimed. 'You'll give me no gas, young man. No! My heart is not good. I should die under gas. I couldn't bear the idea of gas. You must take it out without gas, and you mustn't hurt me. I'm a perfect baby, and you mustn't on any account hurt me.'

The moment was crucial. Supposing that he refused—a promising career might be nipped in the bud; would, undoubtedly, be nipped in the bud. Whereas, if he accepted the task, the patronage of the aristocracy of Hanbridge was within his grasp. But the tooth was colossal, monumental. He estimated the length of its triple root at not less than .75 inch.

'Very well, madam,' he said, for he was a brave youngster.

But he was in a panic. He felt as though he were about to lead the charge of the Light Brigade. He wanted a stiff drink. (But dentists may not drink.) If he failed to wrench the monument out at the first pull the result would be absolute disaster; in an instant he would have ruined the practice which had cost him so dear. And could he hope not to fail with the first pull? At best he would hurt her indescribably. However, having consented, he was obliged to go through with the affair.

He took every possible precaution. He chose his most vicious instrument. He applied to the vicinity of the tooth the very latest substitute for cocaine; he prepared cotton wool and warm water in a glass. And at length, when he could delay the fatal essay no longer, he said:

‘Now I think we are ready.’

‘You won’t hurt me?’ she asked anxiously.

‘Not a bit,’ he replied, with an admirable simulation of gaiety.

‘Because if you do——’

He laughed. But it was an hysterical laugh. All his nerves were on end. And he was very conscious of having had no sleep during the previous night. He had a sick feeling. The room swam. He collected himself with a terrific effort.

‘When I count one,’ he said, ‘I shall take hold; when I count two you must hold very tight to the chair; and when I count three, out it will come.’

Then he encircled her head with his left arm—brutally, as dentists always are brutal in the thrilling crisis. ‘Wider!’ he shouted.

And he took possession of that tooth with his fiendish contrivance of steel.

'One—two——'

He didn't know what he was doing.

There was no three. There was a slight shriek and a thud on the floor. Mrs. Simeon Clowes jumped up and briskly rang a bell. The attendant rushed in. The attendant saw Mrs. Clowes gurgling into a handkerchief, which she pressed to her mouth with one hand, while with the other, in which she held her bonnet, she was fanning the face of Mr. Cowlishaw. Mr. Cowlishaw had fainted from nervous excitement under fatigue. But his unconscious hand held the forceps; and the forceps, victorious, held the monumental tooth.

'O-o-pen the window,' spluttered Mrs. Clowes to the attendant. 'He's gone off; he'll come to in a minute.'

She was flattered. Mr. Cowlishaw was for ever endeared to Mrs. Clowes by this singular proof of her impressiveness. And a woman like that can make the fortune of half a dozen dentists.

H. C. BAILEY

H. C. Bailey, who writes for the Daily Telegraph, has, in Mr. Fortune invented a figure in the same tradition as Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Thorndyke, Hercule Poirot and Lord Peter Wimsey. Unlike them, Fortune is fat, lazy, casual, and apparently rather unscientific (but see pages 93 and 105), though his casual manner is perhaps all part of the business of making him unlike other great sleuths.

He is undoubtedly a great man though, and like other great men he has irritating mannerisms. He is cryptic and rather patronizing, superior in a too kindly way. Nevertheless he delivers the goods in an impressive manner, and his creator is strict, for he neither hides things from the reader nor reveals them too easily to Mr. Fortune—or was he rather lucky to spot that advertisement in the 'Daily Echo'.

THE CAT BURGLAR

'THE decisive factor,' said Mr. Fortune sleepily, 'the decisive factor was that Doris Bromsgrove married Bill Davis. That tore it.' He smiled at the bewildered face of the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. 'Seems irrelevant, what? Who knows the inscrutable design? Doris falls in love with Bill Davis, most ordinary, most correct. And Satan's invisible world's displayed.'

'The nastiest case of my time,' said Lomas. 'I suppose you know you're merely babbling, Reginald.'

'No, no. The web of life. Doris Bromsgrove—as clean and simple as milk—she gets bound up with Mr. Maple Vansittart. It's like finding a link between music and a rat's diseases. Well, there is, of course. Queer, interestin' world, Lomas, old thing.'

So afterwards he philosophized. But he saw nothing queer in the beginning. Doris Bromsgrove, the daughter of that eminent throat specialist, Sir Alcester Bromsgrove, met Bill Davis when he was her father's house physician, and as soon as he was established in a thriving way fell in love with him. She always found it comfortably natural to do the right thing. They married with universal approval, and Reggie Fortune, who had known her since she could talk, and taught Bill Davis the little he will ever know of claret, sent them a parcel of Venetian glass for a wedding present and became a friend of the house. For Doris he respects as one of the few women who understand that tea is a meal.

One afternoon he called a little early. She was not in her drawing-room. When she appeared she had perhaps three hairs on her nice head out of their appointed places. She was almost excited. 'Oh, how do you do? Is this professional?' she said.

'What have I done?' Mr. Fortune gazed at her with alarm. 'Don't you love me any more?'

'You haven't heard? I very nearly sent for you this morning. We've had a burglary, Mr Fortune.'

'I'm so sorry. Anything serious?'

'Well, it's rather horrid in a way. The creatures have taken my moonstones.'

'Moonstones,' Mr. Fortune repeated.

'You know. The set that mother gave me. Dear things. We are insured, of course. But I did rather love them.'

'Yes. Charming. Yes. Too bad. Anything else taken?'

'Nothing at all. We were really awfully lucky, as Bill says. Of course I haven't got so very much. But I was wearing my pearls and my diamond star.'

'Oh! You were out?'

'We had gone to Lady Shovel's dance. We didn't get home till three, and then my moonstones were gone. There were some other little things, but the poor burglar didn't get them. The police say that perhaps something frightened him.'

'Yes. Do the police say anything else?'

'They say it was a cat burglar, Mr. Fortune. It's rather thrilling, isn't it? He must have been awfully clever to get up to my bedroom. The inspector said he was a high-class expert.'

'Who is the inspector?'

'Inspector Pargo. Do you know him? He said the local police thought it was a case for Scotland Yard. He was very solemn and so quick and keen. I was quite frightened. But he is rather a lamb really.'

'Pargo. Yes. He's a burglary specialist, much esteemed. And he says it was an expert's job. Well, well.'

'What do you think of it, Mr. Fortune?'

'I don't think. They wouldn't like me to think about burglars.'

'Oh, you believe there's something Inspector Pargo didn't see! How frightfully thrilling. Do come and look.'

'It's not in my line, you know,' Mr. Fortune murmured, but he let himself be taken up to her room, a pleasant airy place as neat as became her.

'There'—she demonstrated—'the moonstones were in this drawer. The inspector took the case away to look for finger-prints. But he said there wouldn't be any. He couldn't find any on the window or anywhere.'

Mr. Fortune put his head out of the window. The room was on the second floor at the back, more than twenty feet above a small paved yard, behind which was a narrow street with houses only on the farther side.

'The inspector said the burglar must have come down the mews there, got over the wall into the yard and climbed up by the drain pipe. Look! What a distance to stretch to my window-sill!' She shuddered. 'Fancy! In the dark too! He must be an

awfully good climber. I shouldn't like to be a burglar, Mr. Fortune.'

Mr. Fortune brought his head in again and turned from the window to her dressing-table. Besides its silver apparatus, there was some jewellery, a gold bangle, a brooch of opals and diamonds.

'These were lying about?' he inquired.

'No, not last night. They were in the drawer here with these other little things.'

'But he might have had them if he'd looked.'

'Isn't it lucky! He must have been frightened by some noise' the inspector said, and off he went. Fancy getting across to that pipe in the dark when he was frightened! How dreadful if he'd fallen!'

'Yes. Yes. That would have made a bad night of it,' Mr. Fortune murmured.

'Oh!' she shuddered. 'You're rather horrid, aren't you! Sort of cold. As if you didn't believe in it.'

'My dear child, I believe everything. It happened. It all happened just as Pargo said. Some fellow came up the pipe last night and took your moonstones and went off with them, quite hasty.'

Her brown eyes were still troubled. 'You make it sound shivery. I hope he won't come again.'

'Don't worry. He won't come again. Not twice.'

He comforted her further at tea, he left her restored to her wonted simple gaiety, but he walked home by way of the mews and in the morning he called at Scotland Yard.

The Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department was on holiday. 'Salmon-fishing, sir,' Superintendent Bell explained, searching Mr. Fortune's

round and placid face. ‘Didn’t you happen to know?’

‘I know. The ruling passion. He must play at catching creatures. How is life, Bell? Busy?’

‘About the usual. Nothing big, you know.’

‘You have an anxious eye.’

Bell laughed uneasily. ‘That’s your fault, Mr. Fortune. You know, you see too much. I hope I’ll never be up against you. But I wasn’t worrying till you came in. You have a way of bringing us a bit of trouble.’

‘Oh, my Bell! How can you? I’m always smoothin’ things out for you. And this is just a friendly call. Some friends of mine have been and had a burglar.’ Here Bell sighed. ‘I only wanted to say what about it?’ said Mr. Fortune plaintively.

‘Which case is that, sir?’

‘Had a lot lately?’

‘Oh, no—not big stuff. There’s always plenty of little jobs. We haven’t had much high-class work since that crop of West End cases in the spring. The cracks have been lying low for a bit.’

‘This is a West End case. Holland Street. Dr. Davis’s house, night before last.’

Bell nodded. ‘I remember. Cat burglary. Rather fine work.’

‘Yes, yes. I thought that. Does anything else strike the expert mind?’

‘What have you got, sir? Bell grinned.

‘Oh, me! I don’t know any burglars. I’m a child in these things. Please, sir, I want you to tell me all about it.’

'Well, I don't know what there is to tell. Pargo's got the case. We'll have him up if he's here.'

Inspector Pargo came, a slim, light-moving man in clothes of commercial elegance. He was presented to Mr. Fortune and showed a proper sense of the honour. Mr. Fortune wanted to hear all about the Holland Street case. Inspector Pargo was still more impressed.

'They're friends of mine, you see,' said Mr. Fortune.

'I'm sorry, sir.' Inspector Pargo shook his head. 'I'm afraid it's a chance if the lady ever sees her jewellery again. The local police were quite right. It was a high-class professional job. We don't often recover the stuff when a crack gets away with it.'

'No, no. A crack burglar don't often go after moonstones, does he?'

Inspector Pargo chuckled. 'I should say not, sir. He made a poor bag that time. Moonstones!' His quick eyes twinkled at Superintendent Bell. 'Not much market for that sort of stuff' He became serious again. 'But I'm afraid the lady thought a lot of them, Mr. Fortune. We'll do what we can. As I was saying, it was a first-class crack and he had pretty good information.'

'What about the servants?' said Bell.

'I've looked into them, sir. They seem all right. No, I think it was worked from outside. He found out the lady had some good stuff, he got to know about her engagements and managed to pick a night when she and her husband were out. He had to take a chance what she was wearing and it didn't pan out. She hadn't left much behind her but the moonstones. I bet he was sick.'

'Yes. Very clear. Yes. Would you bet you'll get him?'

Inspector Pargo looked knowing. 'Oh, come, sir. Touch wood. It's not a thing to bet on.'

'I suppose you know all the first-class men?' said Reggie meekly.

'I wish I did, Mr. Fortune. I know men who could have done it.' He looked at Bell. 'Not so many either, eh? First-class cat burglars—they're pretty rare. And they lie very low, the cracks. We've never got the man that brought off those jobs in the spring.'

'Oh! One man did the lot, did he?'

Inspector Pargo looked at his superintendent again. 'Not much doubt,' Bell grunted.

'And one man here? Same man?'

'Ah, that's as may be.' Inspector Pargo winked. 'I couldn't say, sir. Spotting the man, you see, for a job of this kind, it's working over the cracks who could have done it and finding what they're up to. Then if you can get a line on one of them you may pick up some evidence.'

'Any hopes?'

'I'm always hoping, sir. Is there anything you'd suggest, Mr. Fortune?'

'Me?' Mr. Fortune opened round eyes. 'Oh, no, not me. It's not in my way. I'm a child in these things. I only come in when you've got a corpse or so.'

'I hope it won't come to that, sir,' Inspector Pargo laughed. He conferred a moment with Bell, he promised to do his best for the lady, he was gone.

Mr. Fortune sat still. Mr. Fortune lit a cigar and gazed solemnly through the smoke at Bell. ‘Zeal, lots of zeal,’ he murmured.

‘He knows his job, sir.’

‘But only one idea.’ Mr. Fortune sighed.

‘Well, it’s a pretty plain case.’

‘My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! The hypothetical expert, he marks down Mrs. Davis as a lady worth burgling: which she isn’t. He takes pains to find out all about her nice house: which hasn’t anything in it. He chooses a night when she’s out at a ball: when she’d be wearing any jewels she’s got. With highly skilled agility he gets in, leaves a lot of gold trinkets alone and pinches a set of moonstones. That’s a very remarkable expert.’

Bell moved in his chair. ‘If you put it like that,’ he said slowly. ‘But you know you can always put a case so it sounds silly. All crimes are silly in a way.’

‘Oh, my Bell! Oh, no. It’s silly to be a criminal at all. But the clever fellows don’t play the fool in their crimes.’

‘I’ve known a lot of ’em fall down over a silly blunder in a clever plan—just like this chap.’

‘Yes, yes. Only he hasn’t fallen.’

‘Why, he only got the moonstones for all his trouble. That’s what you’re saying, sir.’

‘I wonder.’

‘Is there some catch about these moonstones?’ Bell cried.

‘No, no. They’re just moonstones in a little white gold.’

‘I don’t know what you’re getting to, sir.’

'Nor do I, Bell.' Mr. Fortune rose and wandered to the door. 'Quite dark, isn't it, quite dark?' With the door open he paused and looked back. His round face was like a troubled child's.

'I wonder what's next,' he said.

Superintendent Bell breathed hard and when the door was shut allowed himself to remark that he wished Mr. Fortune wouldn't try to see what wasn't there.

On the next day, reading the evening paper in his bath before dinner, according to his habit, Mr. Fortune came upon the headline 'Millionaire Cat Burglary.' A brief, bald narrative informed him that the night before while Lord Silvertown, the soap king, and his wife were out at dinner her dressing-room had been entered by a cat-burglar who had gone off with most of her diamonds. Mr. Fortune came down in his dressing-gown and sought the telephone and called up Superintendent Bell. 'That you, Bell? Fortune speaking. Which I wish to remark—now we do know what's next.' The telephone reported an inarticulate noise. 'Tut, tut,' said Mr. Fortune.

'Is that all you wanted to say, sir?' said the telephone.

'And the next thing, please?' Mr. Fortune inquired. The telephone buzzed and cracked.

The morning papers told the same story with more flowers: reported on the day after that the police had important clues: wrote a history of famous cat burglaries: and forgot all about it. And in a week there was another. The heiress of a gentleman in the frozen meat trade found that her tiara

and dog collar had gone from her bedroom while she was at the fancy dress ball of the season—the only night for weeks, she told reporters with emotion, when she had not worn them. The thought of a girl who never dined without a diamond tiara stirred the great heart of the people and newspapers were bitter about the police force and Mr. Fortune walked across the park to Scotland Yard.

Superintendent Bell lay back and looked at him heavily.

'Hallo, Bell. Seen the papers?' Mr. Fortune smiled.

'I don't worry about what the papers say,' said Bell with slow reproachful emphasis.

'Yes. That's very noble. I'm not sure you're right.'

'But I wish you didn't want to be funny, sir.'

'Oh, Bell!' Mr. Fortune was affected. 'Oh, my dear man. I don't. I wouldn't. I've been and walked all the way across the park to see you about it. Extraordinary energy. And very painful too. I don't ever walk. That shows how serious I'm taking it.'

'That's what bothers me, sir. I know you're thinking something. But you will go on pulling my leg. Ringing me up like that to say "Now we know what's next."' He shook his head. 'It isn't helpful, sir. It isn't like you either.'

'Yes, I think so. I wasn't pulling your leg, Bell. I was humbly suggestin' you weren't taking things seriously.'

'Well now, I didn't think to hear that from you, sir! That's like the papers. You know we can't

do miracles. The only way to work the case is inquiries about the expert burglars who might have done it. It's a slow business, but Pargo's sharp enough and he's got all the men he can use.'

'On the moonstones?'

'Something more than moonstones to think about now, isn't there? But I reckon if we can get the man who had the moonstones we'll have the man who did the other jobs.'

'You think so?'

'Why, isn't that what you said yourself, sir? "I wonder what's next" after the moonstones, and "Now we know what's next" after Lady Silvertown's diamonds were taken. You were always thinking the moonstone case was a fellow getting his hand in.'

'Was I?' Mr. Fortune murmured. 'I didn't say so. No, if I was a crack burglar who knew how to put his hand on diamond necklaces and diamond tiaras I wouldn't bother with a young doctor's wife.'

'Do you mean that wasn't a burglary, sir?'

'No. Oh, no. It was a burglary all right. Up the drain pipe. Fine climbing.'

'Well, there you are!' Bell cried. 'It wasn't worth doing, but it was done.'

'Yes. It was done. That's what's so interesting.'

'Look here, sir. If you didn't mean there'd be other burglaries, what did you mean with your "what next"?"'

'I meant it looked like leading to something. I didn't know what. I don't know now.'

'It looked liked a cat burglar getting to work again,' said Bell. 'That's pretty plain.'

'Plain!' Mr Fortune murmured. 'Oh, Peter! Plain! You haven't caught anybody, have you?'

'You see we have to go by facts, sir,' Bell smiled. 'That makes us so slow. Pargo's had two old hands held for inquiries. Both of them put up good alibis.'

'Oh, yes. There would be alibis. And that's all you've got? Two nice healthy alibis?'

'Well, I don't mind telling you there is another bit of work doing. Pargo's got a line on a fellow who is going to have a lot to explain.'

'Which case?' said Mr. Fortune sharply.

Bell smiled. 'When we've found the man who did one there won't be any complaints.'

Mr. Fortune sank back in his chair.

'It beats me what you're worrying about,' Bell cried.

Mr. Fortune made an odd gesture. His hands moved in the air as if he were trying to grasp something unpleasant. 'It's queer,' he murmured. 'Don't you feel it, Bell? It's queer.'

'Good Lord!' Bell grinned. 'No, sir, not me. You're seeing things. You will try to see what isn't there.'

'You think so? Well, well. Let me know when you get the next alibi.'

But it was Mrs. Davis who brought him into the case again. Two days afterwards he was adjudicating upon some burgundy (a question between Musigny and Richebourg) when he heard her voice, opened the dining-room door and beckoned her in. She came like a leaf on the wind. 'Oh, Mr. Fortune, have you heard? Oh!' She saw the wine and was shocked.

'I am always being misunderstood,' said Mr. Fortune sadly.

'Two bottles of wine in the afternoon!'

'This is a scientific investigation, Doris. One chooses the most placid hour.'

'One is rather a pig,' said Doris, putting up a little nose.

'My poor child,' Mr. Fortune murmured. 'You can't help being a woman, but you shouldn't be proud of it.'

'Oh, don't be silly! Mr. Fortune, they've found my moonstones.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Fortune; and turned away and put a chair for her with mathematical precision.

'I've just been to Scotland Yard to identify them. They are my moonstones. And who do you think took them? They say it was a chauffeur who lived in the mews. And we know him, Mr. Fortune! Such a nice man. I can't believe it. He drives for the Durand Garage. We often have a car from there and he generally takes us. I can't imagine it was him. But they say the moonstones were found in his locker at the garage and I shall have to go into the witness-box and say he did it.' Mr. Fortune's dreamy eyes opened. She went on fast and a little shrill: 'Don't you see? He's always been so nice. It's horrid getting him into trouble.'

'You aren't. You're only saying your moonstones are yours. I'm afraid you'll have to do that.'

'That's what Bill says,' she began to be pathetic. 'I did think you'd be able to help me, Mr. Fortune.'

'I'll go down to the court with you. I'll have another look at the case.'

'I almost wish they hadn't got the things back. That detective said he didn't think they would.'

'Yes, yes. He was wrong there,' Mr. Fortune murmured, watching her with large, solemn eyes.

'Oh, you make me quite frightened!' she cried.

'Not me. No. I'm only seeing fair,' said Mr Fortune. But he had some trouble in getting rid of her. It was an agitated woman whom he deposited in her own house before he drove off to Scotland Yard.

There Superintendent Bell beamed widely upon him. 'Hallo, sir! Have you seen your little lady lately?'

'This isn't kind, Bell. It isn't quite nice. You were going to let me know when you caught anybody else. Now you gloat.'

'Well, sir, you had your bit of fun with me. We haven't found another alibi. Not this time. Has the lady told you?'

'She says you've been and pinched her nice chauffeur.'

'And got her moonstones. She wasn't what you'd call grateful, either. Kind of peevish.' Bell gave a large indulgent sigh. 'You never know with the ladies.'

'You think not? Well, well. How did you get him?'

'You'd better see Pargo, sir. He's made a neat job of it.'

Inspector Pargo came, brisk and smiling. His quick eyes glanced from his superintendent to Mr. Fortune and back again. 'Mr. Fortune wants to hear all about it, Pargo.'

'I'm very glad we've been able to get the lady's

jewels. That's a bit of luck I didn't count on.' He chuckled. 'I'm afraid we won't put our hands on the diamonds. They'll be in Amsterdam by now. But it's Dr. Davis's case you're interested in, of course. There was a fellow I've been looking for some time. Since those burglaries in the spring.' He glanced at Bell. 'But I couldn't get a trace of him. Just before the war there was a fellow we caught on a job in Mayfair. The Squirrel, they called him. Real name Tom Briggs. Started life as an electrician and took to burglary. He turned out a first-class hand at the cat game. Several jobs I know he was in, but we only got him once and then they let him off with a light sentence for a first offence. He came out of prison and we lost sight of him. War time, you know. When we had these fresh cases I started looking for the Squirrel again and after a bit I heard he'd been seen working at the Durand Garage. There he was, bold as brass, but not as Tom Briggs, oh no, he was Mr. Jim Bayliss. He'd got his job with a character in that name from a Major Denham that died before the character was written. And his little home is in the mews at the back of Mrs. Davis's house. I had Jim Bayliss detained, took his finger-prints, found he was the Squirrel right enough and sent a man round to search his place. He kept nothing at home. But in his locker at the garage there were the moonstones done up in a bit of rag and some neat little burglar's tools. That's the case, sir. We've got the real goods this time. See how it all fits in?'

'No. No. Not exactly,' said Mr. Fortune. 'It isn't my sort of case.'

'Well, sir, it's a matter of piecing things together. Here's this chap, a crack burglar, gets a job at a big West End garage. Why? It puts him in the know about all the people that hire from there, like Mrs. Davis. Waiting at theatres and balls he's in touch with the chauffeurs of all the rich folks in London, like Lord Silvertown. That puts him up to their little ways and when they'll be out at night. Then he's got a good car to use and a fine excuse for hanging about with it. He'd just drive up, watch till the coast was clear, do his job, and pop off in the car—and a nice little home handy in the West End to go to. Oh, he's a smart man, the Squirrel.'

'Yes. What's he say about it?'

'Not a word. He knows the game. He don't give anything away.' Inspector Pargo winked. 'If he got talking he might happen to put us on to the diamonds. He don't mean to lose them. He'll take what's coming to him and collect for the diamonds when he comes out. Worth waiting for. He'll have to wait though. He's booked for a long stretch.'

'I don't quite see,' Mr. Fortune said meekly. 'What's the evidence in the diamond cases, Pargo?'

Inspector Pargo glanced at his superintendent.

'If you have three cat burglaries all close in a week and you catch the man that did one, that's pretty good evidence who did the others, Mr. Fortune.'

'Yes. You can say that to me. You won't be able to say it to a judge.'

'I know that, sir. There's a lot of evidence that isn't evidence in court. I can't charge him with the other two cases. But when he's convicted I

shall be satisfied.' His quick eyes consulted Superintendent Bell.

'Not much doubt,' Bell nodded. 'He won't be the first fellow that only took sentence for one crime when we knew he did more. You've seen that in your time, Mr. Fortune?'

'Yes. Yes. An unjust world.'

'It'll work out all right, sir,' Pargo said quickly. 'We'll prove the one case, but the jury will have the others in their minds and so will the judge. The Squirrel will get a good stiff sentence.'

'Oh, my aunt!' Mr. Fortune murmured and sat up. 'Justice: a theory. By Inspector Pargo.' He contemplated that dapper man with smiling curiosity.

'Well, sir, I think it's justice to stop a run of burglaries. And you'll see I've done it, Mr. Fortune.'

'I wonder,' Mr. Fortune murmured. 'Well, well. *Au revoir.*' He strolled out.

What he did next was to ring up Dr. Davis. 'Halloa, Bill. Fortune speaking. I'll drive Doris down to the police court in the morning. You coming?'

The voice which answered suggested that Doris's husband found life difficult. Doris was rather upset. She didn't want to appear against the man. Was it really necessary to go on with the case?

'I don't know how you're going to drop it,' said Mr. Fortune.

The voice gloomily supposed not. Well, Doris should go if she was fit. He was going too, of course. But it was very decent of Fortune.

'She'd better be fit,' said Mr. Fortune.

She was. A tense and angry little woman with

a glum husband entered Mr. Fortune's big car. At the police court Inspector Pargo met her all smiles. 'We shan't keep you long, Mrs. Davis. Your evidence is just a matter of form and—what, Mr. Fortune! Are you giving evidence, too?' he chuckled.

'No. I'm just seeing fair, Pargo.'

The politeness of Inspector Pargo allowed him a moment's stare. 'Oh, Mrs. Davis will be all right, sir,' he said.

They went into court. Thomas Briggs was put in the dock. The solicitor for the police arose. He did not think the charges would detain the court long. Probably his worship would consider it was a case for a jury. The prisoner—

But Mr. Fortune was not listening. He lay back looking with curious intensity at Thomas Briggs. 'The prisoner,' as the reporters say, 'seemed to feel his position acutely.' He was a slim erect fellow with strength in his shoulders, neatly turned out in spite of his night in the cells. He could not stand still, though he kept his right hand gripping the rail of the dock. He turned this way and that, looking round the court, now anxiously, more often with a fierce curiosity, and he had a fighting chin. But it was not his face that Mr. Fortune studied.

A detective-sergeant was in the witness-box. Proceeding to 18 Holland Street on the 6th on information that a burglary had been committed there, he found that a second-floor room had been entered through the window by climbing a drain-pipe. On calling at the Durand Garage he had seen the prisoner acting as a chauffeur under the name of James Bayliss and recognized him as Tom Briggs

convicted of cat burglary in 1913: found that he had made use of a forged character, searched his locker and found there burglar's tools and a set of moonstones.

'It's not true,' a woman screamed.

The prisoner flushed, gulped, put his left hand to his collar and fumbled to ease it. 'God knows it ain't true,' he said. His hand fell and the arm hung bent.

Mrs. Davis was called. Mrs. Davis had often been driven by the prisoner. Mrs. Davis came home on the night of the 5th to find that her bedroom had been entered and her moonstones taken. The moonstones produced were hers. Thank you, Mrs. Davis.

On this evidence—justified in asking—commit prisoner for trial.

'Anything to say, Briggs?'

'I have, sir.' The man in the dock stood to attention. 'What he says about me doing time, that's true. But I've gone straight since, so help me God. When I came out of clink I joined up, name of Bayliss, being mother's name and me wanting to do my bit. I served with the Rutlands, second battalion. You can get my record all right and there's them as would speak for me. When I was demobbed, Major Denham he took me on as chauffeur. But he went west in that French railway smash in 1920 and I was down and out. So I wrote myself a character from him and got on with Durands. And I been straight with Durands, they'll tell you that. I kept off the old game and never saw none of the lads till this spring when one of 'em'—he turned fiercely on the detective-sergeant—'if you know so much you

know the Slug—he came to me at my little place and began to talk about a job he had for me. I slung him out quick. That's all I ever had to do with the old game since I did my bit of time. So help me; I thought I'd wiped it all off. How the swag came into my box at Durands I can't tell no more than a baby. The swine that put the cops on to me he knows all about that.'

'It's a case for a jury, Briggs,' the magistrate said. 'You should have a lawyer, you know. Better have a lawyer.'

'I never done it, sir,' Briggs said sullenly. 'I know I'm for it. You can't fight the cops. But I never done it.'

Mr. Fortune, watching him with scientific interest, was nudged by Bill Davis. 'I say, Doris wants to get out of this.'

'Oh, ah. Take her to the car. I shan't be long.' He slid out of court.

When they saw him next he was coming out of a post office. The agitation of Mrs. Davis was not subdued by waiting. She tried to hide that she was crying by a voice of bitterness and spite. 'I hope you're satisfied, Mr. Fortune.'

Mr. Fortune smiled. 'No, Doris. Not satisfied. But very interested.' He turned to her husband. 'Well, Bill, what about it?' he said briskly.

'It's a miserable business, Fortune.'

'Oh, yes. Quite. What did you make of the man?'

'Poor devil! I don't know what to think. I believe he really meant to keep straight.'

'Of course he did,' Doris cried. 'I hate your horrid policemen, Mr. Fortune!'

'Yes. Yes. I wasn't asking for kind sympathy. I wanted a medical opinion, Bill.'

'Medical?' Dr. Davis stared. 'I didn't see anything—the man's suffering from nervous strain of course—that's to be expected. He's quite normal.'

Mr. Fortune sighed. 'My poor Bill! And I once tried to teach you anatomy!'

'I don't know what anatomy has got to do with it.'

'Oh, hush!' said Mr. Fortune.

Dr. Davis began to ask what he meant, but was overwhelmed by his wife: 'Mr. Fortune, you think there's something—something——' The car stopped.

'Oh yes, there's quite a lot,' said Mr. Fortune, and opened the door and handed her out. 'Good-bye. Scotland Yard, Sam.'

He found Superintendent Bell in conference with Inspector Pargo. 'Thinkin' second thoughts, Pargo?' he smiled.

Pargo laughed. 'It's the Squirrel that's got to think again, isn't it? He didn't cut much ice with that gallery stuff this morning.'

'Ah, I wouldn't say that. He wasn't talking to the gallery.'

'Then I don't know who he was talking to,' Pargo sneered.

'God,' said Mr. Fortune.

Again Pargo laughed. 'More fool he. God knows all about it.'

'That'll do, Pargo.' Bell was shocked. 'You've got something to put to us, Mr. Fortune?'

'Yes. You'd better go into the case.'

Pargo sat forward. 'You'll excuse me, sir, I have.

It's clear evidence and he's got no answer. I'd like to know what you mean.'

'Well, several things. For instance, you didn't mention he'd served in the war.'

'I didn't know he had.'

'Oh, but you said you'd gone into the case! It's time somebody did, Bell. You might look up his regimental record, 2nd Rutlandshires.'

Bell nodded and made a note. 'That's all very well,' Pargo cried. 'I dare say he did his bit. Lots of old lags did. But I'm here to put down crime. And a burglar's a burglar.'

'Yes. Once a burglar always a burglar. That's the hopeful sort of argument that got you into this mess.'

'I see no mess. We've got him sent to trial with a clear case.'

'For a burglary he didn't commit. Yes. Very pleasant all round.'

'Ha, that's pretty good!' Pargo cried. 'I suppose you saw him not doing it?'

'No. I only saw he couldn't do it,' said Mr. Fortune. 'Didn't you notice that? Well, well. His left arm is bent at the elbow and stiff. His left hand won't close. There's some injury to the muscles and nerves, probably from a wound in the war. You should have thought of that. It's impossible for that man to cross from Mrs. Davis's drain-pipe to her window.'

'Good Lord, sir,' Bell said and smiled a rueful smile. 'That's torn it, Pargo.'

'How do you know he wasn't shamming?' Pargo cried.

'I know, thank you,' Mr. Fortune murmured.

'If he's got a weak arm, he'd have said so. He'd have been the poor wounded soldier who couldn't do a cat burglary for his life. You bet he would.'

'And he said nothing. Yes. That's what clears him. He knows he can still climb. He knows he could do a cat burglary. What he doesn't know is that he couldn't do this one. He doesn't know he'd have to hang by his left hand getting from the pipe to the window.' Mr. Fortune gazed at Inspector Pargo with a slow benign smile. 'That proves he wasn't on this job, you see.'

'Does it show how the moonstones got in his box?'

'No. No. That seems to be up to you.'

'What do you mean?' Pargo cried. 'If that's meant for me it ought to be plain.' He appealed to his superintendent. 'Mr. Fortune heard the sergeant swear he found the moonstones in the man's locker. I want to know what he's hinting at.'

'You're so touchy,' Mr. Fortune murmured. 'I'm hinting there's a lot we don't know. Do you know Slug?'

'The Slug? What's that?' Bell said quickly.

'My God!' Inspector Pargo was overcome. 'If you're taking what that fellow said for gospel, you have got a job on.' He gazed at Mr. Fortune with pity and contempt and turned to his superintendent. 'It's the Squirel telling the tale in the dock that's got Mr. Fortune. The usual stuff. One of his old pals has a down on him because he was trying to live honest and wouldn't go back to the old lay. Lord! How many times have we heard that!'

'I've heard it when it was true,' Bell said. 'Some chap he called the Slug came to him, eh? You don't know who he meant?'

'Not me. Never heard the name before. I know most of 'em too.'

'You'll have to go into it,' Bell pronounced. 'See if any of your men have heard of the Slug. If some of 'em remember the chaps this fellow used to work with you might get a line. It wants working, Pargo. I don't like the case. Better get busy.'

'Very good, sir.' Inspector Pargo went out like a lamb—a brisk lamb.

Bell stared heavily at Mr. Fortune. 'He's a bit hard, is Pargo,' he sighed. 'Don't seem to feel things. It hampers him.'

'Yes. Yes. I thought that,' Mr. Fortune smiled.

'But he's sharp, you know. And he does work.'

'Yes, that's what I am afraid of,' said Mr. Fortune. 'Not a nice case, Bell. Not a nice case at all.'

'I'll watch it, sir,' Bell assured him.

Mr. Fortune smiled. When he came out to the courtyard his car had no chauffeur. He exhibited no surprise and drove himself away.

On the next day Mrs. Davis was shown into his consulting-room. 'Oh, Mr. Fortune, I only wanted to ask you—the magistrate said that poor man ought to have a lawyer—and he hasn't any money, of course—I thought perhaps we could get a lawyer for him. Bill says we oughtn't, we're prosecuting him. But I'm not really, am I? I don't see why I shouldn't help him to get off.'

'Don't worry. He's got a lawyer. I sent him one yesterday.'

'You? Oh, Mr. Fortune, you are kind.' She was prettily affected. But Mr. Fortune stared at her with solemn eyes. 'Oh, oh, well, that was all,' she faltered. 'Thank you ever so much. I'm sure you're dreadfully busy.'

He did not deny it. He showed her out and when he came back to the consulting-room took up the paper that was tossed behind his desk, that paper of the million, the *Daily Echo*.

What interested him in it was a small advertisement:

Lothario third. Blue eyes. Case altered.
Auntie gone to grass. Wrong number again. Take
slip or cover.

He studied those remarkable sentences for some time, then copied them out in a large hand and continued his studies.

After a while he took another sheet of paper and with some difficulty worked out this composition:

Lothario third. Blue eyes. Nothing in it. Doing
auntie proud. Meet all off. Sweetbread on the
pounce. Bought the street. Lay him ten to one or
nothing. Some biff.

He frowned at it with dissatisfaction. But having made experiments on it which pleased him no better, put it in his pocket and rang for a taxi and drove to the office of the *Daily Echo*. Thereafter he conferred with the inquiry agent who had once been Inspector Mordan, but emerged pensive.

In that state he remained, to his cook's anxiety,

and it was after a meagre breakfast next day that his telephone called Superintendent Bell.

Bell came briskly into the consulting-room to find him sitting on the small of his back under much cigar smoke. 'I wanted to have a chat with you, sir. You were right about that fellow's arm.'

'Fancy,' Mr. Fortune murmured.

'I had the prison doctor look at it. The arm's all weak and wasted. And we've turned up his record. He was in the Rutlands all right. Stopped some shrapnel at Cambrai. That clears him, doesn't it? We've made a bad break. What beats me is why his pals tried to put the job on him when he was sure to get off.'

'Oh, no, he wasn't. He didn't know he couldn't have done it. If I hadn't seen the window you'd never have known. But I don't think the chap who put the moonstones in his locker knew he'd been wounded.'

'I see. Just doing the dirty on him because he was living respectable? That's a regular crook's trick.'

'Yes. It's all highly professional. Yes. What about his friend the Slug?'

'Pargo can't make anything of that, sir. Nobody seems to know the name. Can't get a line on him at all.'

'I'm always telling you to read the papers. Ever hear of the *Daily Echo*? Nice paper for an infant school. But it doesn't get many agony advertisements. Yesterday it only got this.'

Bell frowned over those cryptic sentences.

Lothario third. Blue eyes. Case altered. Auntie

gone to grass. Wrong number again. Take slip or cover.

'What are you giving me, sir?' he grinned. 'Some flapper and her best boy playing the fool, isn't it?'

'You think so? There was another one printed this morning.'

Bell read out:

Lothario third. Blue eyes. Nothing in it. Doing auntie proud. Meet all off. Sweetbread on the pounce. Bought the street. Lay him ten to one or nothing. Some biff.

'"Sweetbread on the pounce,"' he repeated.
'Feeling skittish, eh?'

'I wasn't,' said Mr. Fortune with indignation.

'Good Lord, sir. You wrote it?'

'Only the second. I thought I'd like to give a helpin' hand. "Sweetbread on the pounce." Yes, it is a little obvious. But I wanted to be quite clear.'

'Clear! That isn't what I'd call it. Some cipher you've got at, is it?'

'Yes, I think so. "Lothario" is the address. The key is "third." Take every third word. "Case—gone—wrong—take—cover." To which I sent the answer. "Nothing—doing—meet—sweetbread—Pounce—Street—or—biff." See?'

'I do not, sir,' said Bell with decision.

'Oh, my dear fellow. But it's quite simple. Some fellow was being warned that the case against the Squirrel had gone wrong and he'd better take cover. So I thought it would do good to answer in his name

that there was nothing doing. He must have a meeting at the Sweetbread—that's the Ris de Veau, a little French restaurant—or biff—he'd blow up the whole concern.'

'What's the idea, sir?'

'The idea is that the case against the Squirrel was put up to cover the man who did the diamond burglaries. You know if you'd got the Squirrel convicted you wouldn't have looked for any one else.'

'It's a bit too clever for me, Mr. Fortune,' Bell said slowly.

'Yes. It's a gamble.'

'You don't know if it's anything to do with the cat burglaries?'

'No, not yet. But I want you to come and dine with me at the Ris de Veau.'

Bell laughed. 'Well, sir, I don't mind if I do. No harm in it, but it's all fancy.'

'No. Quite a nice dinner. Half-past eight? Right. Don't tell anybody.'

'Not me, sir,' Bell chuckled. 'I'd never hear the last of it.'

The Ris de Veau shows a little window like a shop on a narrow street in Soho. Within, it is a place of holes and corners. Superintendent Bell on the stroke of half-past eight found it noisy and bustling. A fat man with the whiskers of a French farce loomed round the piles of fruit on the counter and smiled at him and pointed to a table in a recess behind the door hidden from any man who came in till he was well inside. There Mr. Fortune welcomed him. 'I thought we wanted comfort, Bell. Crayfish soup, plain red mullet, their own particular sweetbread

which is luscious, and an *entrecôte*. Anything in that against your principles?"

"You know all about a dinner, sir," Bell grinned, "but it's not a place a crook would come to, to my mind."

"You think not? Well, well. They keep a fair Corton. Fill the cup that clears to-day of past regrets and future fears. Don't you like olives? What a life!" He discoursed seriously of food. And they dined well and at length, and the company dwindled, but no anxious gentleman looking for a friend appeared. When they had come to the peaches Bell began to fire off some heavy jokes. Nice quiet place to bring your lady friends, the Ris de Veau, but Lothario didn't seem to be coming along with Blue eyes. Perhaps he wasn't much of a hand at cipher. Perhaps Mr. Fortune had rung up the wrong number. . . .

It was long after ten, no one remained at the tables but themselves and a couple of artists with model complete in the latest fashions of Chelsea. "How late are we staying, sir?" Bell grinned. "Looks to me Lothario's turned you down."

"Have you got a man outside?" said Mr. Fortune quickly.

"Not me. I don't draw blanks more than I can help. It's bad for discipline. If you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Fortune, this was a bit hopeful, this stunt. You see you never knew you were on to the cat-burglary case at all."

Somewhere a clock struck eleven. "Well, well," said Mr. Fortune and rose. "Thank you for a very pleasant evening."

They went out to a quiet dark street and parted.

Mr. Fortune had gone some little way when a man crossed the street behind him. He became aware of it as a blow was aimed at his head. He went down on his face like a dead man.

There was a scurry of running feet. The still body was turned and lifted. 'Go after him, you fool,' Mr. Fortune gasped. He was let fall to the pavement again and the feet fled away.

A police whistle screamed, the heavier feet of Superintendent Bell arrived. 'Did they get you, sir?' he panted as he knelt, but Mr. Fortune lay silent. 'My God!' Bell groaned and blew his whistle again and took the limp arm and fumbled for the pulse. . . .

People were coming out of the houses, constables lumbered up. . . .

The body was borne away in an ambulance. Bell went with it to the hospital, saw it carried in with respectful care and turned to meet a brisk young doctor. 'It's Mr. Fortune, Mr. Reginald Fortune. Been knocked on the head by a couple of crooks.'

'Some of 'em getting a bit of their own back?' that young man grinned.

'I'm counting on you to do your best, sir?' said Bell solemnly.

'Oh, we'll do him proud.'

He bent professionally over the body and started. Mr. Fortune's lips had whispered 'Get rid of the nurse.' That busy woman was given an errand which surprised her. Mr. Fortune sat up and smiled. 'Yes, we have no concussion,' he said. 'Only a deuce of a bruise of the right shoulder-blade. Sorry to bother you. But I want it given

out Mr. Reginald Fortune was brought to the hospital with serious injuries. Only that and nothing more. If any newspaper chaps come asking questions, just say that and look wise, what?"

"Can do, sir," the young surgeon grinned.

"Now, Bell, if you'll just telephone that to the newspapers our young friend'll get me quietly out of the hospital."

"I'm going to take you home, sir."

"You can put me to bed if you like. After you've told our able and enterprising Press."

When they were driving away in a taxi, "You gave me a pretty start, Mr. Fortune," Bell reproached him. "What's the idea of lying low?"

"The same idea, same old idea. I want to know what's coming next. Something rather *recherché* if it was worth while knocking me on the head first. Why did they want me out of action? The Squirrel case is broken down anyway. If they think I'm in hospital we'll have the next move good and quick."

"Do you know who hit you, sir?"

"No. No. I only knew he was there when he hit. I dropped as he swung, or I should have had it on the head. Only the end of the blow got me. Quite enough," he wriggled, uncomfortable. "Good heavy life-preserved he used."

"But there were two of them in it. One had you after you fell. Didn't you get a look at him, sir?"

"Oh, that was Mordan. Silly ass. He ought to have caught the beggar."

"Mordan? You've put him on the case? You don't trust us much, sir."

'Well, you know, I did think our friend Pargo wanted a little help. Here we are. Come in, Bell. Another little drink wouldn't do you any harm.'

'Not me, sir. I've had enough, thank you.'

'Oh, my Bell. You're not cross with me?'

Superintendent Bell in a firm voice directed the taxi to Scotland Yard. 'Well, well. Let me know what happens next,' said Mr. Fortune.

It came in the morning, it came while Mr. Fortune, eating his late breakfast, received a report of Inspector Mordan's operations from the mouth of his chauffeur. The telephone rang. Bell was speaking. 'How are you this morning, sir?'

'Sitting up and taking nourishment. Have you got anything?'

'Not about your business, sir. But it's a funny thing, there was another cat burglary last night. Westington way. House of Mr. Maple Vansittart. The chap didn't get away with it this time.'

'How's that?' said Mr. Fortune quickly.

'Had a fall, sir. Picked up dead in the back garden this morning.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Fortune, and turned to his chauffeur. 'They've found the fellow dead in the garden, Sam.'

'My oath!' Sam muttered.

'What's that, sir?' the telephone asked.

'Now we know what was coming next, Bell. Anybody seen the corpse?'

'Local men say the chap broke his neck, sir. Pargo's gone up to the mortuary. The divisional surgeon's doing a post-mortem.'

'What's the matter with me?'

'Well, sir, you're in the Piccadilly Hospital badly hurt.'

'Stick to that. But come round with a couple of hefty men.' Mr. Fortune hung up the receiver. . . .

Superintendent Bell's car drove up. Two large men packed beside the chauffeur gazed solemn surprise at Mr. Fortune, swift and intact.

'What are we doing now, sir?' said Bell.

'Superintendent Bell is goin' to clear up a very nasty business.'

'Is he? You don't mind my saying so, Mr. Fortune, but I do like to be trusted.'

'Oh, Bell. Oh, my Bell. I trusted you with everything last night. You could have given the whole show away. You're coming out all right.'

'Thank you very much, sir.' Bell was ruffled. 'I don't want any compliments, but it beats me why you can't talk plain.'

'Well, do you know anything about Mr. Maple Vansittart?'

'Never heard of him before.'

'No? You haven't heard of him. Had Pargo?'

'He didn't know the name at all.'

Mr. Fortune laughed.

The car stopped at the mortuary. Bell went in first, and behind him Mr. Fortune. Just inside the doorway they met Inspector Pargo. 'Hallo, sir, you've come along?' he said briskly. 'It's what they told us. The surgeon says there's no doubt——'

'Does he though?' Mr. Fortune came round Bell's shoulder.

Inspector Pargo stopped talking and stared at him.

'Yes. You didn't mean me to see the body, did you?' Mr. Fortune said.

Inspector Pargo licked his lips. 'The superintendent said you were in hospital, sir. Very glad you're better, I'm sure. The divisional surgeon's in there with the body. You'll excuse me, sir, I have to get round to the house.'

'No. Oh, no. You've got another engagement. Don't let him break away, Bell.'

'You stand fast,' Bell took a grip of the man. 'What is all this, Mr. Fortune?'

'Oh, Pargo's the man that knocked me out last night.'

'Good Lord! Do you charge him, sir?'

'That'll do to go on with. There'll be other charges all right.'

'I don't know what you mean,' Pargo stammered. 'I never—'

'Why talk?' said Mr. Fortune. 'Mordan saw you. He saw you somewhere else too. Ah, look after his hands, Bell.'

Bell wrenched a pistol out of the man's pocket. 'Like that, eh, Pargo?' he said. 'You fool.' He nodded to the two large men in the doorway and Inspector Pargo was marched out. 'My God, Mr. Fortune, what is this game?'

'Not a nice man, Bell. Not at all a nice man, but he isn't the devil. Well, well. Lock him up and come back. I'll go and have a look at the poor beggar who paid his bill last night.'

The divisional surgeon was surprised and not pleased to see Mr. Fortune. There was nothing in the case. The man's neck was broken. Obviously

by a fall. He had been found lying in the garden of a four-story house. Some burglar's tools on him. Scratches on one of the upper windows and the drain pipe. Quite clear what happened. Fellow climbed up, slipped, fell and was killed. 'Yes, very lucid. . . .' Mr. Fortune murmured, bent over the body. 'Very neat. . . . But there's no injury anywhere except on the head. That's very unusual. And there—and there there's too many.'

'I don't understand you, Mr. Fortune.'

'Oh, but it's quite simple. He didn't have a fall. He was dead before he was put in the garden. Just have a look at those bruises on the head again. Good-bye.'

Bell was waiting outside. What now, sir?'

'Last act. Mr. Maple Vansittart at home.'

'Why, that's the gentleman that was burgled. What's he got to do with it?'

'Oh, Bell!' said Mr. Fortune sadly. 'Oh, my Bell! He wasn't burgled. There wasn't a burglary. That fellow wasn't killed by a fall. He was stunned by a life-preserver. Same like I ought to have been. Then they broke his neck bending his head back and back.'

'They? Who do you mean they, sir?'

'Well, you'd better ask Mr. Maple Vansittart. That poor devil went into his house last night. Mordan's men saw him go in. But he didn't come out again. Not by the front door.'

'But who is he, sir?'

'I'm afraid he's Lothario,' said Mr. Fortune gravely. 'I'm sorry. Not a nice case, Bell. Come on.'

The house of Mr. Maple Vansittart stood in a quiet suburban by-way, one of a row of plain

Victorian dignity embowered in gardens. A man opened the door, a plump man, consisting chiefly of body, who terminated in a dark, shiny face with no features to speak of. 'I am a police officer, Superintendent Bell. I've come to see Mr. Maple Vansittart.'

The man stared a moment. 'This way, sir,' he said and showed them into a room which looked out on the street. 'I will tell Mr. Vansittart,' and he shut the door on them.

By the door Mr. Fortune waited listening. 'What's the matter, sir?' Bell whispered.

'Well, I think we've found the Slug,' Mr. Fortune smiled. 'And I think Mr. Maple Vansittart don't live downstairs.' He opened the door and went into the passage. Another door below opened and shut. Mr. Fortune led the way to the back room. From the window he saw the Slug running across the garden. Bell hoisted himself over the sill. 'Don't worry. The back door's watched,' said Mr. Fortune, and as the Slug opened it he shouted, 'Take that man.' The Slug arrived into the competent arms of Inspector Mordan's men. 'Yes, Mr. Maple Vansittart's being coy. I'm afraid we'll have to look for him by hand.' He glanced round the room, a place of fine taste and many treasures, Empire furniture, a Chinese carpet, a table of rococo jewels, a Fragonard child, a Boucher nymph. 'He's done himself well,' said Mr. Fortune sadly. 'The beast.'

Bell was not attending. Bell was out at the front door. One of his men was to watch it, the other go through the house with him. On their heels Mr. Fortune followed. It was a wonderful house. Mr.

Maple Vansittart guided a catholic love of beautiful things by a sense of harmony. Every room had treasures of furniture and he set them off by pictures and china and fabrics that made the best of them. . . . With reverent and covetous eyes Mr. Fortune wandered about the room with the bed of Louis-Quinze and the Greuze and the tapestries and the beautiful clock, but Mr. Maple Vansittart was not there. He was in none of his charming rooms.

They came to the top landing. Bell's man swung himself up into the cistern loft. There was a shout, a scuffle, he appeared dragging after him a little man all dust and cobwebs, a little man who panted and shook as he was lowered by the scruff of his neck into Bell's arms.

'Yes. You would be like that,' said Mr. Fortune.

The little man brushed at himself and revealed under dirt and smears a neat little grey beard and moustache, a velvet coat and flowing tie.

'Mr. Maple Vansittart, I presume?' Bell asked.

'I don't understand you,' his teeth chattered, 'let me go, please,' he made futile efforts to get away from Bell's grip.

'Stand still. I'm Superintendent Bell. You're under arrest.'

'Me? Oh, no, no. You don't mean that. Why should I be arrested?'

'For murder,' said Mr. Fortune.

'But that's absurd—'

'Better hold your tongue,' Bell broke in. 'Anything you say will be used against you. You know that.'

'My dear sir, you don't understand. It wasn't me. It was Pargo.'

'You little rat,' said Bell.

Mr. Maple Vansittart shrank and his knees were loosened. It was necessary to carry him, a twittering, miserable creature, to the car.

'And that thing was the brains of it all,' Mr. Fortune said wearily. 'Well, well. A queer world.'

'How do you mean the brains of it, sir?'

'Oh, don't you see now? He's the managing director of your cat burglaries. He found out where the stuff was and arranged the operations and disposed of the swag. I don't know when he made contact with Pargo, but I dare say you'll find that going through his pass-book. That simplified things, of course, but it wasn't enough. If you had recurring crops of cat burglaries and nobody was ever caught, there'd be nasty questions for Pargo.'

'There have been, sir. Mr. Lomas made a bit of a fuss over these cases in the spring.'

'Yes. That's why Pargo had to catch a man when they started business again. So our friend the Slug was put on to the Squirrel. Their error. They ought to have found out the fellow had a game arm. But they'd have brought it off all right if I hadn't happened to know Mrs. Davis. Pargo worked it quite neatly. If the Squirrel had been convicted everybody would have believed he was the fellow who did those other burglaries. But that's what struck me. It was all so nice for Inspector Pargo. And I put old Mordan on to watch him and found he was running off to Mr. Maple Vansittart. Then came the advertisement. I knew Pargo had been to the advertisement office of the *Daily Echo*. Nothing in that of course. But it was interesting. So I looked

for anything unusual and I found Lothario third and put in my little answer.' He looked at Bell gravely. 'I'm sorry. You see how it was. They were warning the poor chap who did the burglaries to run for it when he thought he was safe. Then he saw my advertisement too and was more rattled. He came up to Vansittart to know what it all meant. Pargo was here too. They were all scared. I suppose the burglar turned rusty and they laid him out. Then somebody had a brain wave. They had him stunned on their hands, they didn't know what was coming next, why not break his neck and make him into a cat burglar who'd had a fall in his business? If they had any luck left that'd clear it all up. Then Pargo hustled off to the Ris de Veau to see who was on the job there and he saw me. He knew if I had a look at his corpse the game was up. If he could keep me out of it, he would be able to work the divisional surgeon all right. So he had a smack at my head. The last chance. And he thought he'd brought it off. I wonder how he felt when he saw me this morning?'

'Like a lost soul,' said Bell.

'Yes, I think so,' Mr. Fortune said gravely. They passed slowly down the stairs of that silent house. By the room of the Louis Quinze bed and the tapestries of pink and gold, Mr. Fortune stopped. 'Charming; isn't it charming? And Mr. Maple Vansittart was sleeping there while poor devils were doing burglaries and Pargo was selling his soul to keep him nice and comfortable. A queer world, Bell.'

'He'll pay,' said Bell fiercely.

'Oh, my aunt!' Mr. Fortune murmured. 'How can he pay?'

ERNEST BRAMAH

Ernest Bramah is an authority on coins and the author of a number of very good short stories. His best are written with a Chinese background and are told through the lips of Kai Lung, a poor storyteller who wanders from village to village in China, telling his stories to any who will listen and living on whatever payments they care to give him. The villages and the listeners are authentic Chinese; the stories have a charmingly oriental quality, and, though as improbable as the Arabian Nights, they have a more quietly domestic character, fitting an ancient and leisured civilization. The language, though the ordinary person has no means of verifying it, is convincing to a degree that the usual imitator of a foreign storyteller rarely attains. There is something gloriously right about the pipe-maker, Wang Yu, sitting in the shade of a mulberry bush 'waiting for the evil influence of certain very mysterious sounds, which had lately been heard, to pass away'. The way those very simple words are arranged immediately makes one see the narrator, not as a European describing the superstitions of a foreigner, but a dignified Chinese setting down in his own way something which may or may not be true.

But after reading a little of one of Kai Lung's stories, something very curious happens. One realizes that though remaining oriental the story has a very distinct connexion with one's own everyday life. Sly fun is being poked at our own habits and institutions. Sen Heng, the hero, is merely a foolish young man who is too easily cheated when his father puts him into business, and finally succeeds by virtue of his almost idiotic simplicity. The ornate and complicated description of the wicked toy-maker of Hankow, his cheating salesmen, and the adventures of the wretched Sen Heng when made to foist bogus goods on the public is perfect in itself, but though it remains entirely Chinese, it is also an amusing satire on English customs.

THE PROBATION OF SEN HENG

RELATED BY KAI LUNG, AT WU-WHEI, AS
A REBUKE TO WANG YU AND CERTAIN
OTHERS WHO HAD QUESTIONED THE PRAC-
TICAL VALUE OF HIS STORIES

'It is an undoubted fact that this person has not realized the direct remunerative advantage which he confidently anticipated,' remarked the idle and discontented pipe-maker Wang Yu, as, with a few other persons of similar inclination, he sat in the shade of the great mulberry-tree at Wu-whei, waiting for the evil influence of certain very mysterious sounds, which had lately been heard, to pass away before he resumed his occupation. 'When the seemingly proficient and trustworthy Kai Lung first made it his practice to journey to Wu-whei, and narrate to us the doings of persons of all classes of life,' he continued, 'it seemed to this one that by closely following the recital of how mandarins obtained their high position, and exceptionally rich persons their wealth, he must, in the end, inevitably be rendered competent to follow in their illustrious footsteps. Yet in how entirely contrary a direction has the whole course of events tended! In spite of the honourable intention which involved a frequent absence from his place of commerce, those who journeyed thither with the set purpose of possessing one of his justly famed opium pipes so perversely regarded the matter that, after two or three fruitless visits, they deliberately turned their footsteps towards

the workshop of the inelegant Ming-yo, whose pipes are confessedly greatly inferior to those produced by the person who is now speaking. Nevertheless, the rapacious Kai Lung, to whose influence the falling off in custom was thus directly attributable, persistently declined to bear any share whatever in the loss which his profession caused, and, indeed, regarded the circumstance from so grasping and narrow-minded a point of observation that he would not even go to the length of suffering this much-persecuted one to join the circle of his hearers without on every occasion making the customary offering. In this manner a well-intentioned pursuit of riches has insidiously led this person within measurable distance of the bolted dungeon for those who do not meet their just debts, while the only distinction likely to result from his assiduous study of the customs and methods of those high in power is that of being publicly bow-strung as a warning to others. Manifestly the pointed finger of the unreliable Kai Lung is a very treacherous guide.'

'It is related,' said a dispassionate voice behind them, 'that a person of limited intelligence, on being assured that he would certainly one day enjoy an adequate competence if he closely followed the industrious habits of the thrifty bee, spent the greater part of his life in anointing his thighs with the yellow powder which he laboriously collected from the flowers of the field. It is not so recorded; but doubtless the nameless one in question was by profession a maker of opium pipes, for this person has observed from time to time how that occupation, above all

others, tends to degrade the mental faculties, and to debase its followers to a lower position than that of the beasts of labour. Learn therefrom, O superficial Wang Yu, that wisdom lies in an intelligent perception of great principles, and not in a slavish imitation of details which are, for the most part, beyond your simple and insufficient understanding.'

'Such may, indeed, be the case, Kai Lung,' replied Wang Yu sullenly—for it was the story-teller in question who had approached unperceived, and who now stood before them—'but it is none the less a fact that, on the last occasion when this misguided person joined the attending circle at your uplifted voice, a mandarin of the third degree chanced to pass through Wu-whei, and halted at the doorstep of "The Fountain of Beauty," fully intending to entrust this one with the designing and fashioning of a pipe of exceptional elaborateness. This matter, by his absence, has now passed from him, and to-day, through listening to the narrative of how the accomplished Yuin-Pel doubled his fortune, he is the poorer by many taels.'

'Yet to-morrow, when the name of the mandarin of the third degree appears in the list of persons who have transferred their entire property to those who are nearly related to them in order to avoid it being seized to satisfy the just claims made against them,' replied Kai Lung, 'you will be able to regard yourself the richer by so many taels.'

At these words, which recalled to the minds of all who were present the not uncommon manner of behaving observed by those of exalted rank, who freely engaged persons to supply them with costly

articles without in any way regarding the price to be paid, Wang Yu was silent.

'Nevertheless,' exclaimed a thin voice from the edge of the group which surrounded Kai Lung, 'it in nowise follows that the stories are in themselves excellent, or of such a nature that the hearing of their recital will profit a person. Wang Yu may be satisfied with empty words, but there are others present who were studying deep matters when Wang Yu was learning the art of walking. If Kai Lung's stories are of such remunerative benefit as the person in question claims, how does it chance that Kai Lung himself, who is assuredly the best acquainted with them, stands before us in mean apparel, and on all occasions confessing an unassumed poverty?'

'It is Yan-hi Pung,' went from mouth to mouth among the bystanders—'Yan-hi Pung, who traces on paper the words of chants and historical tales, and sells them to such as can afford to buy. And although his motive in exposing the emptiness of Kai Lung's stories may not be Heaven-sent—inasmuch as Kai Lung provides us with such matter as he himself purveys, only at a much more moderate price—yet his words are well-considered, and must therefore be regarded.'

'O Yan-hi Pung,' replied Kai Lung, hearing the name from those who stood about him, and moving towards the aged person, who stood meanwhile leaning upon his staff, and looking from side to side with quickly moving eyelids in a manner very offensive towards the story-teller, 'your just remark shows you to be a person of exceptional wisdom, even as your well-bowed legs prove you to be one

of great bodily strength; for justice is ever obvious and wisdom hidden, and they who build structures for endurance discard the straight and upright and insist upon such an arch as you so symmetrically exemplify.'

Speaking in this conciliatory manner, Kai Lung came up to Yan-hi Pung, and taking between his fingers a disc of thick polished crystal, which the aged and short-sighted chant-writer used for the purpose of magnifying and bringing nearer the letters upon which he was engaged, and which hung around his neck by an embroidered cord, the story-teller held it aloft, crying aloud:

'Observe closely, and presently it will be revealed and made clear how the apparently very conflicting words of the wise Yan-hi Pung, and those of this unassuming but nevertheless conscientious person who is now addressing you, are, in reality, as one great truth.'

With this assurance Kai Lung moved the crystal somewhat, so that it engaged the sun's rays, and concentrated them upon the uncovered crown of the unsuspecting and still objectionably-engaged person before him. Without a moment's pause, Yan-hi Pung leapt high into the air, repeatedly pressing his hand to the spot thus selected, and crying aloud:

'Evil dragons and thunderbolts! but the touch was as hot as a scar left by the uncut nail of the sublime Buddha!'

'Yet the crystal——' remarked Kai Lung composedly, passing it into the hands of those who stood near.

'Is as cool as the innermost leaves of the riverside sycamore,' they declared.

Kai Lung said nothing further, but raised both his hands above his head, as if demanding their judgment. Thereupon a loud shout went up on his behalf, for the greater part of them loved to see the manner in which he brushed aside those who would oppose him; and the sight of the aged person Yan-hi Pung leaping far into the air had caused them to become exceptionally amused, and, in consequence, very amiably disposed towards the one who had afforded them the entertainment.

'The story of Sen Heng,' began Kai Lung, when the discussion had terminated in the manner already recorded, 'concerns itself with one who possessed an unsuspecting and ingenuous nature, which ill-fitted him to take an ordinary part in the everyday affairs of life, no matter how engaging such a character rendered him among his friends and relations. Having at an early age been entrusted with a burden of rice and other produce from his father's fields to dispose of in the best possible manner at a neighbouring mart, and having completed the transaction in a manner extremely advantageous to those with whom he trafficked, but very intolerable to the one who had sent him, it at once became apparent that some other means of gaining a livelihood must be discovered for him.

' "Beyond all doubt," said his father, after considering the matter for a period, "it is a case in which one should be governed by the wise advice and example of the Mandarin Poo-chow."

' "Illustrious sire," exclaimed Sen Heng, who

chanced to be present, "the illiterate person who stands before you is entirely unacquainted with the one to whom you have referred; nevertheless, he will, as you suggest, at once set forth, and journeying with all speed to the abode of the estimable Poo-chow, solicit his experience and advice."

"Unless a more serious loss should be occasioned," replied the father coldly, "there is no necessity to adopt so extreme a course. The benevolent Mandarin in question existed at a remote period of the Thang dynasty, and the incident to which an allusion has been made arose in the following way: To the public court of the enlightened Poo-chow there came one day a youth of very inferior appearance and hesitating manner, who besought his explicit advice, saying: 'The degraded and unprepossessing being before you, O select and venerable Mandarin, is by nature and attainments a person of the utmost timidity and fearfulness. From this cause life itself has become a detestable observance in his eyes, for those who should be his companions of both sexes hold him in undisguised contempt, making various unendurable allusions to the colour and nature of his internal organs whenever he would endeavour to join them. Instruct him, therefore, the manner in which this cowardice may be removed, and no service in return will be esteemed too great.' 'There is a remedy,' replied the benevolent Mandarin, without any hesitation whatever, 'which if properly carried out is efficacious beyond the possibility of failure. Certain component parts of your body are lacking, and before the desired result can be obtained these must

be supplied from without. Of all courageous things the tiger is the most fearless, and in consequence it combines all those ingredients which you require; furthermore, as the teeth of the tiger are the instruments with which it accomplishes its vengeful purpose, there reside the essential principles of its inimitable courage. Let the person who seeks instruction in the matter, therefore, do as follows: taking the teeth of a full-grown tiger as soon as it is slain, and before the essences have time to return into the body, he shall grind them to a powder, and mixing the powder with a portion of rice, consume it. After seven days he must repeat the observance, and yet again a third time, after another similar lapse. Let him, then, return for further guidance; for the present the matter interests this person no further.' At these words the youth departed, filled with a new and inspired hope; for the wisdom of the sagacious Poo-chow was a matter which did not admit of any doubt whatever, and he had spoken with well-defined certainty of the success of the experiment. Nevertheless, after several days industriously spent in endeavouring to obtain by purchase the teeth of a newly-slain tiger, the details of the undertaking began to assume a new and entirely unforeseen aspect; for those whom he approached as being the most likely to possess what he required either became very immoderately and disagreeably amused at the nature of the request, or regarded it as a new and ill-judged form of ridicule, which they prepared to avenge by blows and by base remarks of the most personal variety. At length it became unavoidably obvious to the

youth that if he was to obtain the articles in question it would first be necessary that he should become adept in the art of slaying tigers, for in no other way were the required conditions likely to be present. Although the prospect was one which did not greatly tend to allure him, yet he did not regard it with the utterly incapable emotions which would have been present on an earlier occasion; for the habit of continually guarding himself from the onslaughts of those who received his inquiry in an attitude of narrow-minded distrust had inspired him with a new-found valour, while his amiable and unrestrained manner of life increased his bodily vigour in every degree. First perfecting himself in the use of the bow and arrow, therefore, he betook himself to a wild and very extensive forest, and there concealed himself among the upper foliage of a tall tree standing by the side of a pool of water. On the second night of his watch the youth perceived a large but somewhat ill-conditioned tiger approaching the pool for the purpose of quenching its thirst, whereupon he tremblingly fitted an arrow to his bowstring, and profiting by the instruction he had received, succeeded in piercing the creature to the heart. After fulfilling the observance laid upon him by the discriminating Poo-chow, the youth determined to remain in the forest, and sustain himself upon such food as fell to his weapons, until the time arrived when he should carry out the rite for the last time. At the end of seven days, so subtle had he become in all kinds of hunting, and so strengthened by the meat and herbs upon which he existed, that he disdained to avail himself of the shelter of a tree,

but standing openly by the side of the water, he engaged the attention of the first tiger which came to drink, and discharged arrow after arrow into its body with unfailing power and precision. So entrancing, indeed, had the pursuit become that the next seven days lengthened out into the apparent period of as many moons, in such a leisurely manner did they rise and fall. On the appointed day, without waiting for the evening to arrive, the youth set out with the first appearance of light, and penetrated into the most inaccessible jungles, crying aloud words of taunt-laden challenge to all the beasts therein, and accusing the ancestors of their race of every imaginable variety of evil behaviour. Yet so great had become the renown of the one who stood forth, and so widely had the warning voice been passed from tree to tree, preparing all who dwelt in the forest against his anger, that not even the fiercest replied openly, though low growls and mutterings proceeded from every cave within a bow-shot's distance around. Wearying quickly of such feeble and timorous demonstrations, the youth rushed into the cave from which the loudest murmurs proceeded, and there discovered a tiger of unnatural size, surrounded by the bones of innumerable ones whom it had devoured; for from time to time its ravages became so great and unbearable, that armies were raised in the neighbouring villages and sent to destroy it, but more than a few stragglers never returned. Plainly recognizing that a just and inevitable vengeance had overtaken it, the tiger made only a very inferior exhibition of resistance, and the youth, having first stunned it

with a blow of his closed hand, seized it by the middle, and repeatedly dashed its head against the rocky sides of its retreat. He then performed for the third time the ceremony enjoined by the Mandarin, and having cast upon the cringing and despicable forms concealed in the surrounding woods and caves a look of dignified and ineffable contempt, set out upon his homeward journey, and in the space of three days' time reached the town of the versatile Poo-chow. 'Behold,' exclaimed that person, when, lifting up his eyes, he saw the youth approaching laden with the skins of the tigers and other spoils, 'now at least the youths and maidens of your native village will no longer withdraw themselves from the company of so undoubtedly heroic a person.' 'Illustrious Mandarin,' replied the other, casting both his weapons and his trophies before his inspired adviser's feet, 'what has this person to do with the little ones of either sex? Give him rather the foremost place in your ever-victorious company of bowmen, so that he may repay in part the undoubted debt under which he henceforth exists.' This proposal found favour with the pure-minded Poo-chow, so that in course of time the unassuming youth who had come supplicating his advice became the valiant commander of his army, and the one eventually chosen to present plighting gifts to his only daughter."

'When the father had completed the narrative of how the faint-hearted youth became in the end a courageous and resourceful leader of bowmen, Sen looked up, and not in any degree understanding the purpose of the story, or why it had been set forth before him, exclaimed:

“Undoubtedly the counsel of the graceful and intelligent Mandarin Poo-chow was of inestimable service in the case recorded, and this person would gladly adopt it as his guide for the future, on the chance of it leading to a similar honourable career; but alas! there are no tigers to be found throughout this Province.”

“It is a loss which those who are engaged in commerce in the city of Hankow strive to supply adequately,” replied his father, who had an assured feeling that it would be of no avail to endeavour to show Sen that the story which he had just related was one setting forth a definite precept rather than fixing an exact manner of behaviour. “For that reason,” he continued, “this person has concluded an arrangement by which you will journey to that place, and there enter into the house of commerce of an expert and conscientious vendor of moving contrivances. Among so rapacious and keen-witted a class of persons as they of Hankow, it is exceedingly unlikely that your amiable disposition will involve any individual one in an unavoidable serious loss, and even should such an unforeseen event come to pass, there will, at least, be the undeniable satisfaction of the thought that the unfortunate occurrence will in no way affect the prosperity of those to whom you are bound by the natural ties of affection.”

“Benovolent and virtuous-minded father,” replied Sen gently, but speaking with an inspired conviction; “from his earliest infancy this unassuming one has been instructed in an inviolable regard for the Five General Principles of Fidelity to the Emperor, Respect for Parents, Harmony between

Husband and Wife, Agreement among Brothers, and Constancy in Friendship. It will be entirely unnecessary to inform so pious-minded a person as the one now being addressed that no evil can attend the footsteps of an individual who courteously observes these enactments."

"Without doubt it is so arranged by the protecting Deities," replied the father; "yet it is an exceedingly desirable thing for those who are responsible in the matter that the footsteps to which reference has been made should not linger in the neighbourhood of this village, but should with all possible speed, turn in the direction of Hankow."

In this manner it came to pass that Sen Heng set forth on the following day, and coming without delay to the great and powerful city of Hankow, sought out the house of commerce known as "The Pure Gilt Dragon of Exceptional Symmetry," where the versatile King-y-Yang engaged in the entrancing occupation of contriving moving figures, and other devices of an ingenious and mirth-provoking character, which he entrusted into the hands of numerous persons to sell throughout the Province. From this cause, although enjoying a very agreeable recompense from the sale of the objects, the greatly perturbed King-y-Yang suffered continual internal misgivings; for the habit of behaving of those whom he appointed to go forth in the manner described was such that he could not entirely dismiss from his mind an assured conviction that the details were not invariably as they were represented to be. Frequently would one return in a very deficient and unpresentable condition of garment, asserting that on his return,

while passing through a lonely and unprotected district, he had been assailed by an armed band of robbers, and despoiled of all he possessed. Another would claim to have been made the sport of evil spirits, who led him astray by means of false signs in the forest, and finally destroyed his entire burden of commodities, accompanying the unworthy act by loud cries of triumphs and remarks of an insulting nature concerning King-y-Yang; for the honourable character and charitable actions of the person in question had made him very objectionable to that class of beings. Others continually accounted for the absence of the required number of taels by declaring that at a certain point of their journey they were made the object of marks of amiable condescension on the part of a high and dignified public official, who, on learning in whose service they were, immediately professed an intimate personal friendship with the estimable King-y-Yang, and, out of a feeling of gratified respect for him, took away all such contrivances as remained undisposed of, promising to arrange the payment with the refined King-y-Yang himself when they should next meet. For these reasons King-y-Yang was especially desirous of obtaining one whose spoken word could be received, upon all points, as an assured fact, and it was, therefore, with an emotion of internal lightness that he confidently heard from those who were acquainted with the person that Sen Heng was, by nature and endowments, utterly incapable of representing matters of even the most insignificant degree to be otherwise than what they really were.

'Filled with an acute anxiety to discover what

amount of success would be accorded to his latest contrivance, King-y-Yang led Sen Heng to a secluded chamber, and there instructed him in the method of selling certain apparently very ingeniously constructed ducks, which would have the appearance of swimming about on the surface of an open vessel of water, at the same time uttering loud and ever-increasing cries, after the manner of their kind. With ill-restrained admiration at the skilful nature of the deception, King-y-Yang pointed out that the ducks which were to be disposed of, and upon which a seemingly very low price was fixed, did not, in reality, possess any of these accomplishments, but would, on the contrary, if placed in water, at once sink to the bottom in a most incapable manner; it being part of Sen's duty to exhibit only a specially prepared creature which was restrained upon the surface by means of hidden cords, and, while bending over it, to simulate the cries as agreed upon. After satisfying himself that Sen could perform these movements competently, King-y-Yang sent him forth, particularly charging him that he should not return without a sum of money which fully represented the entire number of ducks entrusted to him, or an adequate number of unsold ducks to compensate for the deficiency.

'At the end of seven days Sen returned to King-y-Yang, and although entirely without money, even to the extent of being unable to provide himself with the merest necessities of a frugal existence, he honourably returned the full number of ducks with which he had set out. It then became evident that although Sen had diligently perfected himself in

the sounds and movements which King-y-Yang had contrived, he had not fully understood that they were to be executed stealthily, but had, in consequence, manifested the accomplishment openly, not unreasonably supposing that such an exhibition would be an additional inducement to those who appeared to be well-disposed towards the purchase. From this cause it came about that although large crowds were attracted by Sen's manner of conducting the enterprise, none actually engaged to purchase even the least expensively valued of the ducks, although several publicly complimented Sen on his exceptional proficiency, and repeatedly urged him to louder and more frequent cries, suggesting that by such means possible buyers might be attracted to the spot from remote and inaccessible villages in the neighbourhood.

'When King-y-Yang learned how the venture had been carried out, he became most intolerably self-opinionated in his expressions towards Sen's mental attainments and the manner of his bringing up. It was entirely in vain that the one referred to pointed out in a tone of persuasive and courteous restraint that he had not, down to the most minute particulars, transgressed either the general or the specific obligations of the Five General Principles, and that, therefore, he was blameless, and even worthy of commendation for the manner in which he had acted. With an inelegant absence of all refined feeling, King-y-Yang most incapably declined to discuss the various aspects of the controversy in an amiable manner, asserting, indeed, that for the consideration of as many brass cash as Sen had

mentioned principles he would cause him to be thrown into prison as a person of unnatural ineptitude. Then, without rewarding Sen for the time spent in his service, or even inviting him to partake of food and wine, the insufferable deviser of very indifferent animated contrivances again sent him out, this time into the streets of Hankow with a number of delicately inlaid boxes, remarking in a tone of voice which plainly indicated an exactly contrary desire that he would be filled with an overwhelming satisfaction if Sen could discover any excuse for returning a second time without disposing of anything. This remark Sen's ingenuous nature led him to regard as a definite fact, so that when a passer-by, who tarried to examine the boxes chanced to remark that the colours might have been arranged to greater advantage, in which case he would certainly have purchased at least one of the articles, Sen hastened back, although in a distant part of the city, to inform King-y-Yang of the suggestion, adding that he himself had been favourably impressed with the improvement which would be effected by such an alteration.

'The nature of King-y-Yang's emotion when Sen again presented himself before him—and when by repeatedly applied tests on various parts of his body he understood that he was neither the victim of malicious demons, nor wandering in an insensible condition in the Middle Air, but that the cause of the return was such as had been plainly stated—was of so mixed and benumbing a variety, that for a considerable space of time he was quite unable to express himself in any way, either by words or by

signs. By the time these attributes returned there had formed itself within King-y-Yang's mind a design of most contemptible malignity, which seemed to present to his enfeebled intellect a scheme by which Sen would be adequately punished, and finally disposed of, without causing him any further trouble in the matter. For this purpose he concealed the real condition of his sentiments towards Sen, and warmly expressed himself in terms of delicate flattery regarding that one's sumptuous and unfailing taste in the matter of the blending of the colours. Without doubt, he continued, such an alteration as the one proposed would greatly increase the attractiveness of the inlaid boxes, and the matter should be engaged upon without delay. In the meantime, however, not to waste the immediate services of so discriminating and persevering a servant, he would entrust Sen with a mission of exceptional importance, which would certainly tend greatly to his remunerative benefit. In the district of Yun, in the north-western part of the Province, said the crafty and treacherous King-y-Yang, a particular kind of insect was greatly esteemed on account of the beneficent influence which it exercised over the rice plants, causing them to mature earlier, and to attain a greater size than ever happened in its absence. In recent years this creature had rarely been seen in the neighbourhood of Yun, and, in consequence, the earth-tillers throughout that country had been brought into a most disconcerting state of poverty, and would, inevitably, be prepared to exchange whatever they still possessed for even a few of the insects, in order that they might liberate

them to increase, and so entirely reverse the objectionable state of things. Speaking in this manner, King-y-Yang entrusted to Sen a carefully prepared box containing a score of the insects, obtained at a great cost from a country beyond the Bitter Water, and after giving him further directions concerning the journey, and enjoining the utmost secrecy about the valuable contents of the box, he sent him forth.

'The discreet and sagacious will already have understood the nature of King-y-Yang's intolerable artifice; but, for the benefit of the amiable and unsuspecting, it is necessary to make it clear that the words which he had spoken bore no sort of resemblance to affairs as they really existed. The district around Yun was indeed involved in a most unprepossessing destitution, but this had been caused, not by the absence of any rare and auspicious insect, but by the presence of vast hordes of locusts, which had overwhelmed and devoured the entire face of the country. It so chanced that among the recently constructed devices at "The Pure Gilt Dragon of Exceptional Symmetry" were a number of elegant representations of rice fields and fruit gardens so skilfully fashioned that they deceived even the creatures, and attracted, among other living things, all the locusts in Hankow into that place of commerce. It was a number of these insects that King-y-Yang vindictively placed in the box which he instructed Sen to carry to Yun, well knowing that the reception which would be accorded to any one who appeared there on such a mission would be of so fatally destructive a kind that the

consideration of his return need not engage a single conjecture.

'Entirely tranquil in intellect—for the possibility of King-y-Yang's intention being in any way other than what he had represented it to be did not arise within Sen's ingenuous mind—the person in question cheerfully set forth on his long but unavoidable march towards the region of Yun. As he journeyed along the way, the nature of his meditation brought up before him the events which had taken place since his arrival at Hankow; and, for the first time, it was brought within his understanding that the story of the youth and the three tigers, which his father had related to him, was in the likeness of a proverb, by which counsel and warning is conveyed in a graceful and inoffensive manner. Readily applying the fable to his own condition, he could not doubt but that the first two animals to be overthrown were represented by the two undertakings which he had already conscientiously performed in the matter of the mechanical ducks and the inlaid boxes, and the conviction that he was even then engaged on the third and last trial filled him with an intelligent gladness so unobtrusive and refined that he could express his entrancing emotions in no other way than by lifting up his voice and uttering the far-reaching cries which he had used on the first of the occasions just referred to.

'In this manner the first part of the journey passed away with engaging celerity. Anxious as Sen undoubtedly was to complete the third task, and approach the details which, in his own case, would correspond with the command of the bowmen and

the marriage with the Mandarin's daughter of the person in the story, the noontide heat compelled him to rest in the shade by the wayside for a lengthy period each day. During one of these pauses it occurred to his versatile mind that the time which was otherwise uselessly expended might be well disposed of in endeavouring to increase the value and condition of the creatures under his care by instructing them in the performance of some simple accomplishment, such as might not be too laborious for their feeble and immature understanding. In this he was more successful than he had imagined could possibly have been the case, for the discriminating insects, from the first, had every appearance of recognizing that Sen was inspired by a sincere regard for their ultimate benefit, and was not merely using them for his own advancement. So assiduously did they devote themselves to their allotted tasks, that in a very short space of time there was no detail in connexion with their own simple domestic arrangements that was not understood and daily carried out by an appointed band. Entranced at this intelligent manner of conducting themselves Sen industriously applied his time to the more congenial task of instructing them in the refined arts, and presently he had the enchanting satisfaction of witnessing a number of the most cultivated faultlessly and unhesitatingly perform a portion of the well-known gravity-removing play entitled "The Benevolent Omen of White Dragon Tea Garden; or, Three Times a Mandarin." Not even content with this elevating display, Sen ingeniously contrived, from various objects which he discovered at different

points by the wayside, an effective and life-like representation of a war-junk, for which he trained a crew, who, at an agreed signal, would take up their appointed places and go through the required movements, both of sailing, and of discharging the guns, in a reliable and efficient manner.

'As Sen was one day educating the least competent of the insects in the simpler parts of banner-carriers, gong-beaters, and the like, to their more graceful and versatile companions, he lifted up his eyes and beheld, standing by his side, a person of very elaborately embroidered apparel and commanding personality, who had all the appearance of one who had been observing his movements for some space of time. Calling up within his remembrance the warning which he had received from King-y-Yang, Sen was preparing to restore the creatures to their closed box, when the stranger in, a loud and dignified voice, commanded him to refrain, adding:

' "There is, resting at a spot within the immediate neighbourhood, a person of illustrious name and ancestry, who would doubtless be gratified to witness the diverting actions of which this one has recently been a spectator. As the reward of a tael cannot be unwelcome to a person of your inferior appearance and unpresentable garments, take up your box without delay, and follow the one who is now before you."

'With these words the richly clad stranger led the way through a narrow woodland path, closely followed by Sen, to whom the attraction of the promised reward—a larger sum, indeed, than he

had ever possessed—was sufficiently alluring to make him determined that the other should not, for the briefest possible moment, pass beyond his sight.

'Not to withhold that which Sen was entirely ignorant of until a later period, it is now revealed that the person in question was the official Provider of Diversions and Pleasurable Occupations to the sacred and illimitable Emperor, who was then engaged in making an unusually extensive march through the eight Provinces surrounding his Capital—for the acute and well-educated will not need to be reminded that Nankin occupied that position at the time now engaged with. Until his providential discovery of Sen, the distinguished Provider had been immersed in a most unenviable condition of despair, for his enlightened but exceedingly perverse-minded master had, of late, declined to be in any way amused, or even interested, by the simple and unpretentious entertainment which could be obtained in so inaccessible a region. The well-intentioned efforts of the followers of the Court, who engagingly endeavoured to divert the Imperial mind by performing certain feats which they remembered to have witnessed on previous occasions, but which, until the necessity arose, they had never essayed, were entirely without result of a beneficial order. Even the accomplished Provider's one attainment—that of striking together both the hands and the feet thrice simultaneously, while leaping into the air, and at the same time producing a sound not unlike that emitted by a large and vigorous bee when held captive in the fold of a robe, an action which never failed to throw the illustrious Emperor into a most

uncontrollable state of amusement when performed within the Imperial Palace—now only drew from him the unsympathetic, if not actually offensive, remark that the attitude and the noise bore a marked resemblance to those produced by a person when being bowstrung, adding, with unprepossessing significance, that of the two entertainments he had an unevadable conviction that the bowstringing would be the more acceptable and gravity-removing.

'When Sen beheld the size and the silk-hung magnificence of the camp into which his guide led him, he was filled with astonishment, and at the same time recognized that he had acted in an injudicious and hasty manner by so readily accepting the offer of a tael; whereas, if he had been in possession of the true facts of the case, as they now appeared, he would certainly have endeavoured to obtain double that amount before consenting. As he was hesitating in a most uncongenial state of uncertainty, and debating withim himself whether the matter might not even yet be arranged in a more advantageous manner, he was suddenly led forward into the most striking and ornamental of the tents, and commanded to engage the attention of the one in whose presence he found himself, without delay.

'From the first moment when the inimitable creatures began, at Sen's spoken word, to go through the ordinary details of their domestic affairs, there was no sort of doubt as to the nature of the success with which their well-trained exertions would be received. The dark shadows instantly forsook the enraptured Emperor's select brow, and from time to time he expressed himself in words of most

unrestrained and intimate encouragement. So exuberant became the overjoyed Provider's emotion at having at length succeeded in obtaining the services of one who was able to recall his Imperial master's unclouded countenance, that he came forward in a most unpresentable state of haste, and rose into the air uncommanded, for the display of his usually not unwelcome acquirement. This he would doubtless have executed competently had not Sen, who stood immediately behind him, suddenly and unexpectedly raised his voice in a very vigorous and proficient duck cry, thereby causing the one before him to endeavour to turn round in alarm, while yet in the air—an intermingled state of movements of both the body and the mind that caused him to abandon his original intention in a manner which removed the gravity of the Emperor to an even more pronounced degree than had been effected by the diverting attitudes of the insects.

'When the gratified Emperor had beheld every portion of the tasks which Sen had instilled into the minds of the insects, down even to the minutest detail, he called the well-satisfied Provider before him, and addressing him in a voice which might be designed to betray either sternness or an amiable indulgence, said:

““You, O Shan-se, are reported to be a person of no particular intellect or discernment, and, for this reason, these ones who are speaking have a desire to know how the matter will present itself in your eyes. Which is it the more commendable and honourable for a person to train to a condition of unfailing excellence, human beings of confessed

intelligence or insects of a low and degraded standard?"

"To this remark the discriminating Shan-se made no reply, being, indeed, undecided in his mind whether such a course was expected of him. On several previous occasions the somewhat introspective Emperor had addressed himself to persons in what they judged to be the form of a question, as one might say, "How blue is the unapproachable air canopy, and how delicately imagined the colour of the clouds!" yet when they had expressed their deliberate opinion on the subjects referred to, stating the exact degree of blueness, and the like, the nature of their reception ever afterwards was such that, for the future, persons endeavoured to determine exactly the intention of the Emperor's mind before declaring themselves in words. Being exceedingly doubtful on this occasion, therefore, the very cautious Shan-se adopted the more prudent and uncompromising attitude, and smiling acquiescently, he raised both his hands with a self-deprecatory movement.

"‘Alas!’” exclaimed the Emperor, in a tone which plainly indicated that the evasive Shan-se had adopted a course which did not commend itself, “how unendurable a condition of affairs is it for a person of acute mental perception to be annoyed by the inopportune behaviour of one who is only fit to mix on terms of equality with beggars, and low-caste street cleaners——”

“Such a condition of affairs is indeed most offensively unbearable, illustrious Being,” remarked Shan-se, who clearly perceived that his former

silence had not been productive of a delicate state of feeling towards himself.

“It has frequently been said,” continued the courteous and pure-minded Emperor, only signifying his refined displeasure at Shan-se’s really ill-considered observation by so arranging his position that the person in question no longer enjoyed the sublime distinction of gazing upon his beneficent face, “that titles and offices have been accorded, from time to time, without any regard for the fitting qualifications of those to whom they were presented. The truth that such a state of things does occasionally exist has been brought before our eyes during the past few days by the abandoned and inefficient behaviour of one who will henceforth be a marked official; yet it has always been our endeavour to reward expert and unassuming merit, whenever it is discovered. As we were setting forth, when we were interrupted in a most obstinate and superfluous manner, the one who can guide and cultivate the minds of unthinking, and not infrequently obstinate and rapacious, insects would certainly enjoy an even greater measure of success if entrusted with the discriminating intellects of human beings. For this reason it appears that no more fitting person could be found to occupy the important and well-rewarded position of Chief Arranger of the Competitive Examinations than the one before us—provided his opinions and manner of expressing himself are such as commend themselves to us. To satisfy us on this point let Sen Heng now stand forth and declare his beliefs.”

“On this invitation Sen advanced the requisite

number of paces, and not in any degree understanding what was required of him, determined that the occasion was one when he might fittingly declare the Five General Principles which were ever present in his mind. "Unquestioning Fidelity to the Sacred Emperor——" he began, when the person in question signified that the trial was over.

"After so competent and inspired an expression as that which has just been uttered, which, if rightly considered, includes all lesser things, it is unnecessary to say more," he declared affably. "The appointment which has already been specified is now declared to be legally conferred. The evening will be devoted to a repetition of the entrancing manœuvres performed by the insects, to be followed by a feast and music in honour of the recognized worth and position of the accomplished Sen Heng. There is really no necessity for the apparently over-fatigued Shan-se to attend the festival."

'In such a manner was the foundation of Sen's ultimate prosperity established, by which he came in the process of time to occupy a very high place in public esteem. Yet, being a person of honourable-minded conscientiousness, he did not hesitate, when questioned by those who made pilgrimages to him for the purpose of learning by what means he had risen to so remunerative a position, to ascribe his success, not entirely to his own intelligent perception of persons and events, but, in part also, to a never-failing regard for the dictates of the Five General Principles, and a discriminating subservience to the inspired wisdom of the venerable Poo-chow, as conveyed to him in the story of the faint-hearted

youth and the three tigers. This story Sen furthermore caused to be inscribed in letters of gold, and displayed in a prominent position in his native village, where it has since doubtless been the means of instructing and advancing countless observant ones who have not been too insufferable to be guided by the experience of those who have gone before.'

A. A. MILNE

When he was an undergraduate at Cambridge A. A. Milne edited the Granta, and on coming to London in 1903 he became a regular journalist. He contributed a good deal to Punch, and in 1906 he became assistant editor. This he remained until the war.

His deliciously witty and absurd articles in Punch enjoyed tremendous popularity; so did, and do, his novels, of which one, The Red House Mystery, is now considered a classic of its kind. A writer of great versatility, he published in 1934 a lightly written but profound pamphlet in favour of world peace and disarmament, Peace with Honour.

He is, besides, the author of many memorable and amusing plays, notably Wurzel Flummery, Mr. Pym Passes By and The Romantic Age, and of some of the most successful children's books of our time. When We Were Very Young and its successors had a reception as startling as that of Alice in Wonderland.

The present story appeared in Punch and is simply a light-hearted skit on the typical fairy tale. All the usual ingredients are there: the charming prince, the magic ring, the princes in distress, the giant, and so on. But a kind of absurd inverted common sense brings about a peculiar and entertaining result.

A MATTER-OF-FACT FAIRY TALE

ONCE upon a time there was a King who had three sons. The two eldest were lazy, good-for-nothing young men, but the third son, whose name was Charming, was a delightful youth, who was loved by everybody (outside his family) who knew him. Whenever he rode through the town the people used to stop whatever work they were engaged upon and wave their caps and cry ‘Hurrah for Prince Charming!’—and even after he had passed they would continue to stop work, in case he might be coming back the same way, when they would wave their caps and cry ‘Hurrah for Prince Charming!’ again. It was wonderful how fond of him they were.

But, alas! his father the King was not so fond. He preferred his eldest son; which was funny of him, because he must have known that only the third and youngest son is ever any good in a family. Indeed, the King himself had been a third son, so he had really no excuse for ignorance on the point. I am afraid the truth was that he was jealous of Charming, because the latter was so popular outside his family.

Now there lived in the Palace an old woman called Countess Caramel, who had been governess to Charming when he was young. When the Queen lay dying the Countess had promised her that she would look after her youngest boy for her, and Charming had often confided in Caramel since.

One morning, when his family had been particularly rude to him at breakfast, Charming said to her:

'Countess, I have made up my mind, and I am going into the world to seek my fortune.'

'I have been waiting for this,' said the Countess. 'Here is a magic ring. Wear it always on your little finger, and whenever you want help turn it round once and help will come.'

Charming thanked her and put the ring on his finger. Then he turned it round once just to make sure that it worked. Immediately the oddest little dwarf appeared in front of him.

'Speak and I will obey,' said the dwarf.

Now Charming didn't want anything at all just then, so after thinking for a moment he said, 'Go away!'

The dwarf, a little surprised, disappeared.

'This is splendid,' thought Charming, and he started on his travels with a light heart.

The sun was at its highest as he came to a thick wood, and in its shade he lay down to rest. He was awakened by the sound of weeping. Rising hastily to his feet he peered through the trees, and there fifty yards away from him, by the side of a stream sat the most beautiful damsel he had ever seen, wringing her hands and sobbing bitterly. Prince Charming, grieving at the sight of beauty in such distress, coughed and came nearer.

'Princess,' he said, tenderly, for he knew she must be a Princess, 'you are in trouble. How can I help you?'

'Fair sir,' she answered, 'I had thought to be alone. But, since you are here, you can help me if you will. I have a—a brother—'

But Charming did not want to talk about brothers. He sat down on a fallen log beside her, and looked at her entranced.

'I think you are the most lovely lady in all the world,' he said.

'Am I?' said the Princess, whose name, by the way, was Beauty.

She looked away from him and there was silence between them. Charming, a little at a loss, fidgeted nervously with his ring, and began to speak again.

'Ever since I have known you——'

'You are in need of help?' said the dwarf, appearing suddenly.

'Certainly not,' said Charming angrily. 'Not in the least. I can manage this quite well by myself.'

'Speak, and I will obey.'

'Then go away,' said Charming; and the dwarf, who was beginning to lose his grip of things, again disappeared.

The Princess, having politely pretended to be looking for something while this was going on, turned to him again.

'Come with me,' she said, 'and I will show you how you can help me.'

She took him by the hand and led him down a narrow glade to a little clearing in the middle of the wood. Then she made him sit down beside her on the grass, and there she told him her tale.

'There is a giant called Blunderbus,' she said, 'who lives in a great castle ten miles from here. He is a terrible magician, and years ago because I would not marry him he turned my—my brother into a—

I don't know how to tell you—into a—a tortoise.' She put her hands to her face and sobbed again.

'Why a tortoise?' said Charming, knowing that sympathy was useless, but feeling that he ought to say *something*.

'I don't know. He just thought of it. It—it isn't a very nice thing to be.'

'And why should he turn your *brother* into it? I mean, if he had turned *you* into a tortoise—— Of course,' he went on hurriedly, 'I'm very glad he didn't.'

'Thank you,' said Beauty.

'But I don't understand why——'

'He knew he could hurt me more by making my brother a tortoise than by making me one,' she explained, and looked at him anxiously.

This was a new idea to Charming, who had two brothers of his own; and he looked at her in some surprise.

'Oh, what does it matter *why* he did it?' she cried as he was about to speak. 'Why do giants do things? I don't know.'

'Princess,' said Charming, remorsefully, and kissed her hand, 'tell me how I can help you.'

'My brother,' said Beauty, 'was to have met me here. He is late again.' She sighed and added, 'He used to be *so* punctual.'

'But how can I help him?' asked Charming.

'It is like this. The only way in which the enchantment can be taken off him is for someone to kill the Giant. But if once the enchantment has stayed on for seven years, then it stays on for ever.'

Here she looked down and burst into tears.

'The seven years,' she sobbed, 'are over at sundown this afternoon.'

'I see,' said Charming, thoughtfully.

'Here is my brother,' cried Beauty.

An enormous tortoise came slowly into view. Beauty rushed up to him and, having explained the situation rapidly, made the necessary introduction.

'Charmed,' said the Tortoise. 'You can't miss the castle; it's the only one near here, and Blunderbus is sure to be at home. I need not tell you how grateful I shall be if you kill him. Though I must say,' he added, 'it puzzles me to think how you are going to do it.'

'I have a friend who will help me,' said Charming, fingering his ring.

'Well, I only hope you'll be luckier than the others.'

'The others?' cried Charming, in surprise.

'Yes; didn't she tell you about the others who had tried?'

'I forgot to,' said Beauty, frowning at him.

'Ah, well, perhaps in that case we'd better not go into it now,' said the Tortoise. 'But before you start I should like to talk to you privately for a moment.' He took Charming on one side and whispered, 'I say, do you know anything about tortoises?'

'Very little,' said Charming. 'In fact——'

'Then you don't happen to know what they eat?'

'I'm afraid I don't.'

'Dash it, why doesn't *anybody* know? The others all made the most ridiculous suggestions. Steak and kidney puddings—and shrimp sandwiches—and buttered toast. Dear me! The nights we had after

the shrimp sandwiches! And the fool swore he had kept tortoises all his life!

'If I may say so,' said Charming, 'I should have thought that *you* would have known best.'

'The same silly idea they all have,' said the Tortoise testily. 'When Blunderbus put this enchantment on me, do you suppose he got a blackboard and a piece of chalk and gave me a lecture on the diets and habits of the common tortoise, before showing me out of the front gate? No, he simply turned me into the form of a tortoise and left my mind and soul as it was before. I've got the anatomy of a tortoise, I've got the very delicate inside of a tortoise, but I don't *think* like one, stupid. Else I shouldn't mind being one.'

'I never thought of that.'

'No one does, except me. And I can think of nothing else.' He paused and added confidentially, 'We're trying rum omelettes just now. Somehow I don't think tortoises *really* like them. However, we shall see. I suppose you've never heard anything definite against them?'

'You needn't bother about that,' said Charming, briskly. 'By to-night you will be a man again.' And he patted him encouragingly on the shell and returned to take an affectionate farewell of the Princess.

As soon as he was alone, Charming turned the ring round his finger, and the dwarf appeared before him.

'The same as usual?' said the dwarf, preparing to vanish at the word. He was just beginning to get into the swing of it.

'No, no,' said Charming, hastily. 'I really want you this time.' He thought for a moment. 'I want,' he said at last, 'a sword. One that will kill giants.'

Instantly a gleaming sword was at his feet. He picked it up and examined it.

'Is this really a magic sword?'

'It has but to inflict one scratch,' said the dwarf, 'and the result is death.'

Charming, who had been feeling the blade, took his thumb away hastily.

'Then I shall want a cloak of darkness,' he said.

'Behold, here it is. Beneath this cloak the wearer is invisible to the eyes of his enemies.'

'One thing more,' said Charming. 'A pair of seven-league boots. . . . Thank you. That is all to-day.'

Directly the dwarf was gone, Charming kicked off his shoes and stepped into the magic boots; then he seized the sword and the cloak and darted off on his lady's behest. He had barely gone a hundred paces before a sudden idea came to him, and he pulled himself up short.

'Let me see,' he reflected; 'the castle was ten miles away. These are seven-league boots—so that I have come about two thousand miles. I shall have to go back.' He took some hasty steps back, and found himself in the wood from which he had started.

'Well?' said Princess Beauty, 'have you killed him?'

'No, n-no,' stammered Charming, 'not exactly killed him. I was just—just practising something. The fact is,' he added, confidentially, 'I've got a pair of new boots on, and——' He saw the look of

cold surprise in her voice and went on quickly, 'I swear, Princess, that I will not return to you again without his head.'

He took a quick step in the direction of the castle and found himself soaring over it; turned eleven miles off and stepped back a pace; overshot it again, and arrived at the very feet of the Princess.

'His head!' said Beauty, eagerly.

'I—I must have dropped it,' said Charming, hastily pretending to feel for it. 'I'll just go and—' He stepped off in confusion.

Eleven miles the wrong side of the castle, Charming sat down to think it out. It was but two hours to sundown. Without his magic boots he would get to the castle too late. Of course, what he really wanted to do was to erect an isosceles triangle on a base of eleven miles, having two sides of twenty-one miles each. But this was before Euclid's time.

However, by taking one step to the north and another to the south-west, he found himself close enough. A short but painful walk, with his boots in his hand, brought him to his destination. He had a moment's natural hesitation about making a first call at the castle in his stocking feet, but consoled himself with the thought that in life-and-death matters one cannot bother about little points of etiquette, and that, anyhow, the giant would not be able to see him. Then, donning the magic cloak, and with the magic sword in his hand, he entered the castle gates. For an instant his heart seemed to stop beating, but the thought of the Princess gave him new courage. . . .

The Giant was sitting in front of the fire, his great

spiked club between his knees. At Charming's entry he turned round, gave a start of surprise, bent forward eagerly a moment, and then leant back chuckling. Like most overgrown men he was naturally kindhearted and had a simple humour, but he could be stubborn when he liked. The original affair of the tortoise seems to have shown him both at his best and at his worst.

'Why do you walk like that?' he said pleasantly to Charming. 'The baby is not asleep.'

Charming stopped short.

'You see me?' he cried, furiously.

'Of course I do! Really, you mustn't expect to come in to a house without anything on your feet and not be a *little* noticeable. Even in a crowd I should have picked you out.'

'That miserable dwarf,' said Charming, savagely, 'swore solemnly to me that beneath this cloak I was invisible to the eyes of my enemies!'

'But then we *aren't* enemies,' smiled the Giant, sweetly. 'I like you immensely. There's something about you—directly you came in . . . I think it must be love at first sight.'

'So *that's* how he tricked me!'

'Oh, no, it wasn't really like that. The fact is you are invisible *beneath* that cloak, only—you'll excuse my pointing it out—there are such funny bits of you that aren't beneath the cloak. You've no idea how odd you look; just a head and two legs, and a couple of arms. . . . Waists,' he murmured to himself, 'are not being worn this year.'

But Charming had had enough of talk. Gripping his sword firmly, he threw aside his useless cloak,

dashed forward, and with a beautiful lunge pricked his enemy in the ankle.

'Victory!' he cried, waving his magic sword above his head. 'Thus is Beauty's brother delivered!'

The Giant stared at him for a full minute. Then he put his hands to his sides and fell back shaking in his chair.

'Her brother!' he roared. 'Well, of all the— Her *brother*!' He rolled on the floor in a paroxysm of mirth. 'Her brother! Oh, you—— You'll kill me! Her b-b-b-b-brother! Her b-b-b-b—her b-b-b—her b-b——'

The world suddenly seemed very cold to Charming. He turned the ring on his finger.

'Well?' said the dwarf.

'I want,' said Charming curtly, 'to be back at home, riding through the streets on my cream palfrey amidst the cheers of the populace. . . . At once.'

An hour later Princess Beauty and Prince Udo, who was not her brother, gazed into each other's eyes; and Beauty's last illusion went.

'You've altered,' she said, slowly.

'Yes, I'm not *really* much like a tortoise,' said Udo, humorously.

'I meant since seven years ago. You're much stouter than I thought.'

'Time hasn't exactly stood still with you, you know, Beauty.'

'Yet you saw me every day, and went on loving me.'

'Well—er——' He shuffled his feet and looked away.

'*Didn't* you?'

'Well, you see—of course I wanted to get back, you see—and as long as you—I mean if we—if you thought we were in love with each other, then, of course, you were ready to help me. And so——'

'You're quite old and bald. I can't think why I didn't notice it before.'

'Well, you wouldn't when I was a tortoise,' said Udo pleasantly. 'As tortoises go I was really quite a youngster. Besides, anyhow, one never notices baldness in a tortoise.'

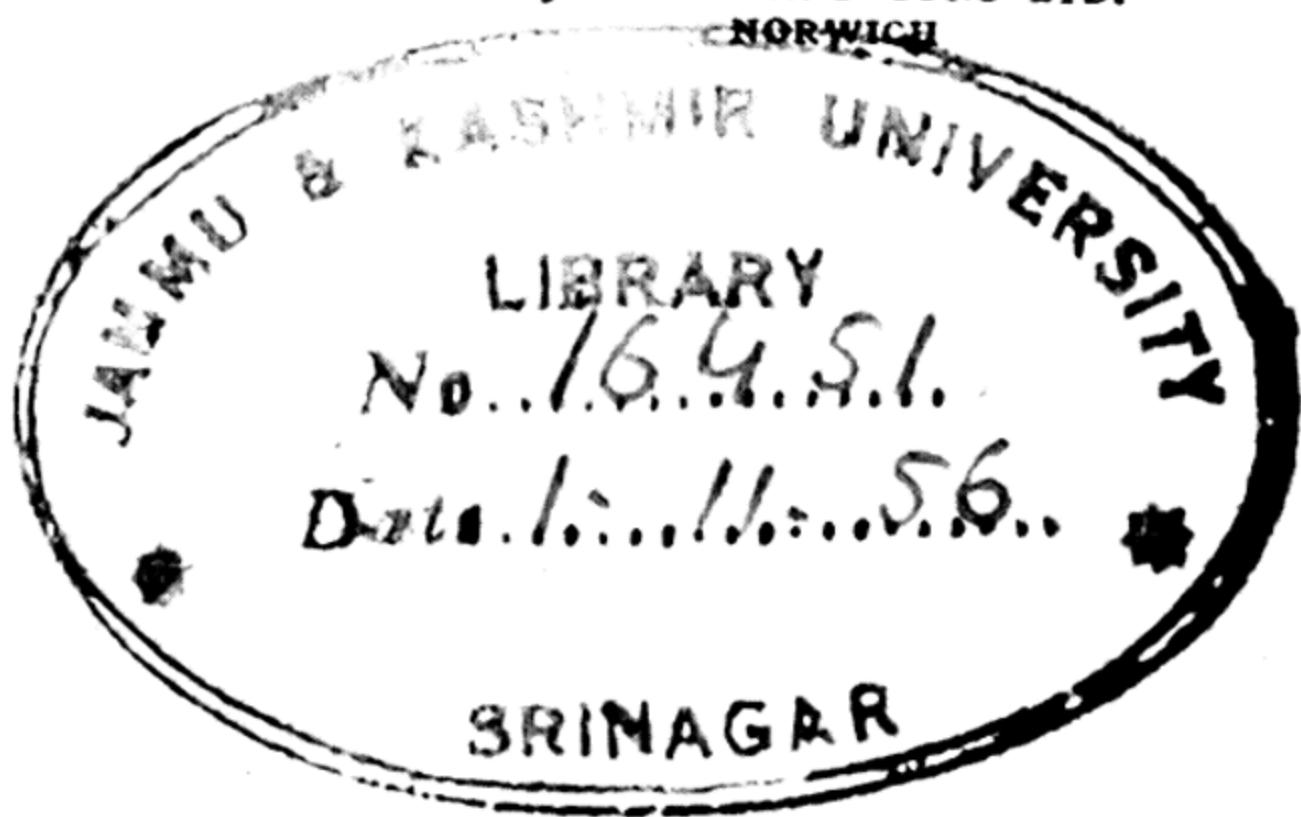
'I think,' said Beauty, weighing her words carefully, 'I think you've gone off a good deal in looks in the last day or two.'

• • • •

Charming was home in time for dinner; and next morning he was more popular than ever (outside his family) as he rode through the streets of the city. But Blunderbus lay dead in his castle. You and I know that he was killed by the magic sword; yet somehow a strange legend grew up around his death. And ever afterwards in that country, when one man told his neighbour a more than ordinarily humorous anecdote, the latter would cry, in between the gusts of merriment, 'Don't! You'll make me die of laughter!' And then he would pull himself together, and add with a sigh: 'Like Blunderbus.'

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